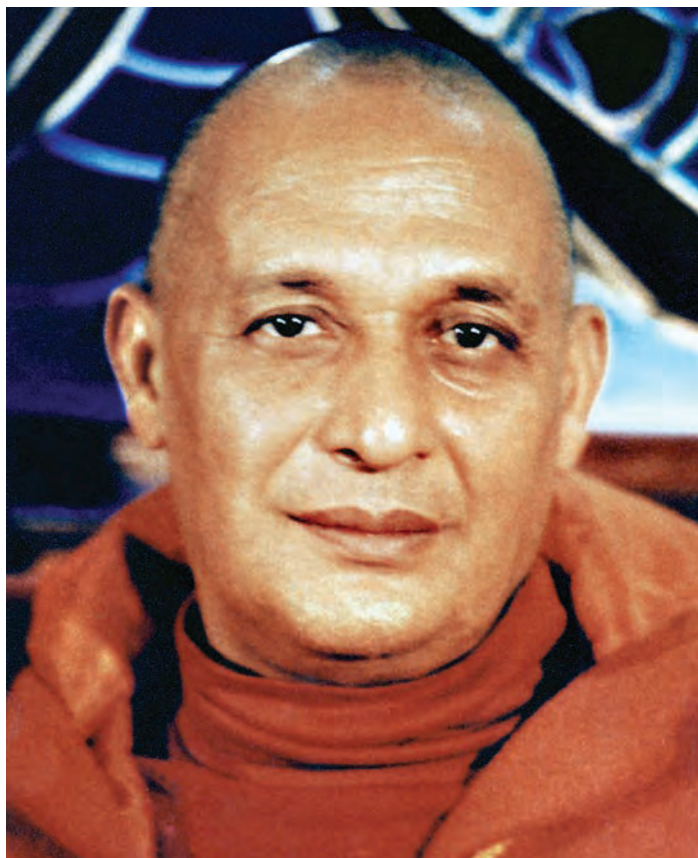


Volume I

Teachings of Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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Swami Satyananda
Saraswati
Volume I



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Teachings of Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Volume I

*This material has been compiled from satsangs given by
Swami Satyananda Saraswati during his 1979 European tour,
his visits to Australia in 1976, 1978 and 1980, and the
1979 Kriya Yoga and Teacher Training courses held at
Bihar School of Yoga, Munger.*



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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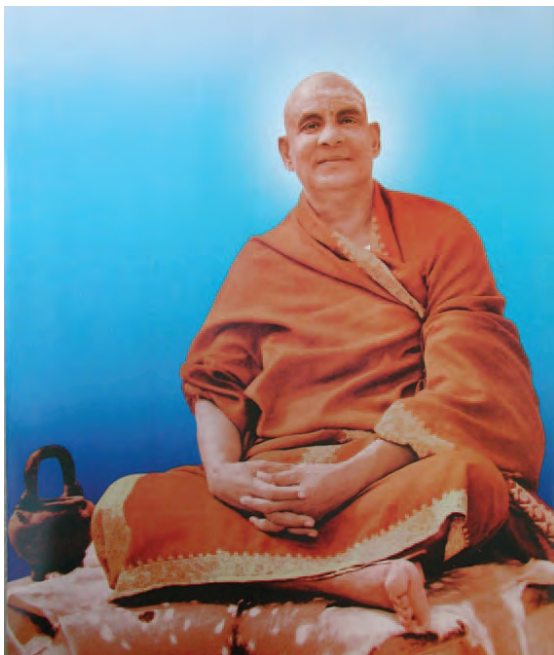
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

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1

Yoga Today

What kind of yoga do you teach?

There is only one definition of yoga. Yoga means to be able to control the varying patterns of consciousness, and this, of course, is what I teach everybody. But if I find that their body is not cooperating, then I try to mend it also.

The practices of yoga are divided into four main branches: karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja and jnana yoga. For people of dynamic temperament it is karma yoga; for those who are mainly emotional – bhakti yoga; for those who are predominantly rational – jnana yoga; and for those who are mainly psychic – raja yoga. Raja yoga has many sub-branches: hatha yoga, laya yoga, kundalini yoga and mantra yoga. Besides this there is another system known as tantra yoga, which is the sum total of all these. Its main practice is known as kriya yoga. I mainly teach kriya yoga, but for me yoga is an all-inclusive science. Though I teach kriya yoga, I know that the other forms of yoga are necessary for preparing the body and mind.

Must one follow only one branch of yoga or should we combine them all?

All these paths should be combined. You can't live without karma. You have to work and perform actions all the time. If you don't practise karma yoga, you'll experience frustrations, disappointments and the consequent reactions in life.

If you don't practise bhakti, then passions will rise high. If you don't practise raja yoga, the mind will be jumping around like a drunken monkey. If you don't practise jnana, you won't know why you are practising all these things, and if you don't practise hatha yoga, then you may not be able to practise any of them.

Is yoga a path of suffering? If so, why do it?

Yoga is not a path of suffering in the sense that we understand it. Yoga is a way to perfect bliss, *anandam*. What is the aim of yoga? Samadhi. What is the effect of meditation? Shanti. What is the effect of dharana? One-pointedness. What is the effect of pranayama? A good brain. What is the effect of asanas? A light and healthy body. What is the result of niyama? A system or science of life. What is the effect of yama? Breaking down the complications in life. So how can that be suffering?

Does yoga place any absolute prohibitions or demands on an individual?

The aim of yoga is to experience a homogeneous flow of awareness. Prohibitions and acceptance belong to the realm of religious traditions. For a person who is discovering the truth there are no milestones and no barricades. I don't agree with those groups of people who create systems and then compel others to follow.

How is the knowledge of yoga being disseminated around the world?

When I was in Zinal, Switzerland, yoga teachers from forty-seven countries attended an international yoga conference there. There is another conference in Dublin, which people from all over Europe will attend.

I was also in Denmark and I found that the education department there sends circulars to every Danish citizen, inviting them to participate in yoga lessons for which the government pays. The awakening is definitely underway there. In my class in our Scandinavian ashram, there were one hundred and

twenty people. This is not discouraging, and similarly big crowds aren't necessarily encouraging either. It is the quality which is important, not the quantity. It only matters that you are here and I am here.

Many people may think that there must be fifty thousand people to listen to the message of yoga. This is not the case. Yoga is not a political matter; it is a science of man's inner personality. It is a subject which is sincere, earnest and great. Yoga is a mighty culture in the making, and very soon it is going to direct the experiences, behaviour, thought and perception of mankind.

Should European people practise a different type of yoga than Indians?

It depends on the problems of the people. Indian and European people have the same type of passions, diseases and psychological problems. I think psychological problems are international and universal. Languages and food habits are different, but the hunger, passion, impressions, greed, jealousy and fears are the same. So the same type of yoga can be taught to all.

Why are foreigners more receptive to yoga than the Indians, even though yoga is part of the Indian culture?

Modern science has discovered the raw material in India and it has taken it away to make it into a finished product. These people are very intelligent; they are going to take yoga with them, add the finishing touches and then disseminate it.

The religions in western countries have not been able to fulfil the spiritual needs of the people. Therefore, there are many who are disillusioned, and when they hear about yoga, they realize that it is just the thing they need in life. That is why so many people from all parts of the world have accepted yoga immediately, without any doubts.

The second point is that western society has reached a climax and is approaching a turning point. Yoga has come to them at the turning point and has given them a new concept of life.

Do you feel that the yoga movement is overstressing eastern habits such as shaved heads, dhotis, Indian names, chanting and using a strange language to the exclusion of more basic yoga principles?

It is important to remember that people are free. No one is compelled to involve themselves in these things. It should also be remembered that the world is no longer isolated and we cannot keep ourselves within the folds of a closed culture. The languages, habits, cultures and so many other things in this free world have to be viewed with an open mind. Just because your grandfathers accepted a particular culture, it does not mean that you belong solely to that culture. Perhaps your forefathers came from a land where the religion and culture were different, but they accepted this culture and religion because it was convenient, or maybe circumstances forced them to.

If people want to accept a new culture, philosophy or way of life, why shouldn't they? After all, languages, names, dress and dietary habits have been changing decade by decade. In our modern society they change by the day. Therefore, we should try to be as flexible and open to change as possible and not be negative about any cultural inflows.

There are many cultures which are probably more valuable, tangible and durable than our own. So, if we want a rich and beautiful culture, we have to be open in all respects. We should let fresh ideas and new philosophies flow into our present culture and we should be open to both the occident and the orient. After all, the orient is not just a waste paper basket, and the occident is not the only acceptable and beautifully decorated culture.

Can yoga solve the problems of poverty in the world?

If everybody wished for poverty, the world would become heaven. Everybody is trying to be wealthy, but all the great saints have said that one has to live a life of self-imposed poverty. Actually, the word poverty should be replaced by the word simplicity. Simplicity in life is living exactly in accordance with your necessities and means.

Whenever you amplify your material necessities, that creates a complication on the spiritual as well as the social plane. There is no doubt about it, it is easier for a camel to enter through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. When a man becomes wealthy, his mind becomes inactive. Wealth is the opium of man. Therefore, we should try our level best to live according to necessity. Nowadays, many nations are trying very hard to overcome poverty. They are trying to raise the standard of living for the people of their country. But I think the whole process should be reversed; back to poverty, simplicity and natural life.

Could you explain why yoga does not address itself to social issues, but is directed to individuals?

Individuals make society. If we just make yoga a social philosophy, then it becomes an institution or an organization like many religions have become. But if we restrict yoga to the individual, then individuals will evolve, and if thousands of people all over the world undergo the experience of evolution, then the whole community will definitely be influenced indirectly by yoga. So we can say that yoga influences the social structure by helping the individual to evolve. There are two methods of approach. We can make a society and the society will influence the individual, or we can train the individuals and the individuals will make the society. I work towards the latter.

Do you think a householder has sufficient discipline to practise yoga?

Yoga does not need discipline. It is man who needs discipline, and yoga can help him. Just as medicine doesn't need a healthy person, similarly, yoga is for people who are undisciplined.

What is the role of faith in the practice of yoga?

Faith gives stature to your personality and faith is power. It is the wealth of the spiritual aspirant. One may be a great

scholar who understands the whole of yoga, one may practise pranayama and meditation day and night, one may visit the church or temple daily and one may have gurus and gurus, but without faith one will never see the inner self. A man is blind without faith. *Avidya*, or ignorance, can only be eliminated by faith, which is made up of purity, simplicity and innocence.

With the help of faith, yoga can relieve illnesses, kriya yoga can trigger the dormant kundalini, and a disciple can become even greater than his own guru. Actually, a disciple's attitude to guru is an act of faith. If you rend this faith asunder, then the guru is only a man, Christ was only a magician, and St Francis and St Xavier were just vagabonds.

Faith is not an act of thinking or even an act of conviction. The real nature of every being is faith, but in society people are brought up to hide that faith, just as they wear many clothes to hide their bodies. Therefore, faith cannot be developed, it has to be realized. In order to realize faith, you must practise your mantra and sadhana, attend satsang more frequently, and read the lives of great saints like Chaitanya, Mirabai, Dayananda and Theresa of Avila.

Can one who is infirm take up yoga?

One can practise yoga at any time. But if you take up the practice of yoga for the sake of therapy, then there are certain restrictions. And if you take up yoga at an advanced age, you don't start with padmasana or dhanurasana. You begin with pawanmuktasana and other light practices.

Is hypnosis used in yoga?

Hypnotism is one of the beginning stages of raja yoga which is used when the individual is distracted, dissipated and unable to help himself. Then, when his mind is comparatively calm, he is asked to practise concentration and meditation.

The word 'hypnos' means to sleep, and in yoga we have a special technique for this called *yoga nidra*, which means 'yogic sleep'. At the time of yoga nidra, any sound is registered like

a seed in fertile ground. If I record a chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* and let you hear it during this practice, within fifteen days you will be able to repeat the whole chapter verbatim. This is because in hypnosis we free the consciousness from logic, reasoning and intellectual strangulations, which are great barriers. The consciousness is directly exposed to influences and suggestions without any reflector or filter. This method is very powerful and can remove many disorders in a few days.

We can define hypnosis as that state of consciousness which has no intellectual or emotional superimpositions. There is also the system called autohypnosis. This is one of the most elementary systems in yoga, whereby an aspirant exposes himself before himself, and tries to put himself on the right route.

Please remember one important thing about hypnotism. The gifts of hypnotism do not last. Relapses always occur because the basic structure of man is not influenced; hypnotism influences only part of the consciousness. If you try to eradicate mental problems through hypnosis, you may overcome them temporarily, but the seed, the spiritual, psychological or karmic seed of the problem is still present. For the removal of this seed, you will have to go deeply into yoga.

Some people who practise yoga lose interest in their worldly life. Won't this lead to non-participation in life?

All over the world people have been living an extroverted life and when they start practising yoga, the total guilt in their personality comes out. This can influence their behaviour and develop in them some kind of distaste for karma, activity, accomplishment and so on. As such you have to accept yoga in the right spirit and you have to be directed by the guru.

In India, no guru has ever preached abnegation from duties. If you read the *Bhagavad Gita*, you'll find its whole theme is karma yoga and participation in life. If you read *Yoga Vashishtha*, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and *Srimad Bhagavata*, you will understand that it is not abnegation or annihilation of

karma that yoga should bring about. If yoga brings distaste for karma, if yoga kills in you a sense of duty and responsibility, then it is not working right.

Now, for some people, this distaste is necessary for a certain time. It helps them to step out of the old and rotten way of life. When I say ‘old and rotten way of life’, I don’t mean to criticize your lifestyle, but I refer to the unscientific and unhealthy aspects of your life. This distaste brings you closer to your mind and helps you to analyze your life. Thereby, one by one, you are able to nip those negative, unscientific, unhealthy and rotten habits and you can formulate a new lifestyle and a better approach to life.

Please explain the difference between a yogi and a philosopher.

Was Socrates a yogi or a philosopher? Socrates was not a philosopher, he was a yogi, a knower of the truth. I also have a philosophy but I am not a philosopher. You see, by the word ‘philosopher’ we mean a person who teaches one system and says, “This is this”, but Socrates was a seeker of truth; he was a yogi.

The yogi is experiencing the truth and the philosopher is trying to explain the order of the realization of the truth. Just like a politician, he plays politics. He doesn’t necessarily know anything; he is a statesman. But a political philosopher gives an explanation, organization and interpretation of the system of politics, and his whole philosophy revolves around that. Whereas Socrates was a yogi, Plato was a political philosopher and Marcus Aurelius was a yogi who had a philosophy.

What is meant by living and teaching yoga?

To live yoga is to be in harmony with yourself. You know what your mind is like. At the same time you know what kind of conflicting patterns you are imbibing in life. How unsteady the mind is! How can you teach tranquillity to others while you yourself are disturbed? We have seen many doctors of psychology and psychiatry who treat mental disease, but they

themselves are mental patients. When I say that one has to live yoga, I mean that one has to live a harmonious life in body, mind and spirit. The word yoga represents harmony, unity and coordination. This sense of harmony and unity has to be expressed and practised in relation to your own self first, then with the people you live with.

If you live a life of disharmony within yourself and with the people you live among, then you know what type of troubles you are going to create. Living yoga means organizing the patterns of one's own life. Many times we see people teaching yoga who go to bed late at night and wake up very late in the morning. The same thing applies to their diet and all other aspects of their personal life. If you have no system, discipline and order in your life, you may still be a good yoga teacher, but you won't be in harmony with yourself. We come across many teachers of yoga throughout the world and some of them surely live a balanced life, but others live a life of paradoxes.

There are many yoga teachers who have a lot of psychological problems, physical problems, family and social problems. They are unsteady in their determination and inaccurate in their decisions. Therefore, when I say that you should not merely teach yoga, but also live yoga, I mean you should create a harmonious pattern in your life.

Will there be enough teachers for the increasing number of people who want to practise yoga?

There is a law of supply and demand. Where there is demand there will be supply. Through the practice of asanas and pranayama you can prepare your body, mind and nervous system, so that from among you many enlightened people will come forth with a thorough knowledge of the science, and they will make very capable teachers.

How long does it take to become a yoga teacher?

Well, everything depends on the individual, but if you want to become a competent yoga teacher, it will take from three to five years.

Should we charge for yoga classes?

Oh yes, sure. In 1968, when I was on a world tour, I found that yoga was being taught everywhere. I met many teachers and tried to introduce them to the idea of fixing a remuneration, but nobody accepted it. The next time I saw these people I said to them, “Look here, I’m not talking of a science of 1970, I’m talking of a system that is as old as the Upanishads and Vedas.” It is said in the Upanishads that when you approach the guru for *diksha*, initiation, you give him *dakshina*, an offering. Guru initiates and the disciple offers. What does he offer? He can offer a flower, fruit, Ganga water, a piece of gold, silver coins, or even a bank note. It’s all the same; you can offer anything. When you are teaching yoga to people, you are giving them a great science of life, not just a therapy. Yoga therapy is a by-product, but the purpose of yoga is enlightenment.

Things are very different now from what they were fifty years back. Of course, the population was less then and the economic stresses were not the same as they are today. There were also fewer towns, roads and motor cars. In those days, if you went to a guru and did not give him anything, it did not matter. He would go to a nearby forest, pick a few fruits and leaves and eat them. But now, even if you went looking for edible leaves you’d be unlikely to find any, and if you did, they’d probably be covered in the poisonous exhaust fumes of motor cars. Life is different now, fewer things are free and everyone, including yoga teachers, must be properly maintained.

When friends ask about yoga and spiritual life, how much should one tell them?

The first thing to tell them is to start practising yoga. An ounce of practical experience is much better than tons of theory.

When we find something good like yoga, we would like to share it with others. This can’t be done by force, so by what means can we do it?

You must help others by suggesting the practices of yoga, but don’t become fanatical like many yoga teachers and religious

advocates. Nothing should be imposed on man, neither social nor religious beliefs. Man is completely free. To help others, you are giving yoga, only from the viewpoint of their personal difficulties and problems. You should never be like an aggressive sales agent. You have to be very intellectual, sober, logical, compassionate and tactful.

Yoga should be given, not for the sake of yoga, but for the sake of the human being. Yoga is actually a science for mankind, for one's body, mind and spiritual growth. You should teach yoga to others in the same humble and compassionate manner as you would give medicine to a sick person – “he needs and I can give”. Supposing whenever I have a headache I take aspirin and it works. When I know that you have a headache, I will advise you to take aspirin. Now, I'm not a missionary and I'm not an agent of the aspirin company, but I know aspirin relieves me of headaches and it will also do the same for you. That should be the spirit in teaching, inspiring and guiding yoga.

Is it correct for a householder to propagate yoga and try to be an example?

A householder should first of all practise yoga. Then he should inspire others, and finally, if possible, he should teach. If by the word ‘propagate’ you mean practising, inspiring and teaching, then I agree with the word propagate. But if you mean something else, surely I don't agree.

If yoga can only be taught by a guru, what is the purpose of all your yoga books and magazines?

Any instruction which is given in books and periodicals is only to give you a guideline. In the books the author always tries to explain the practices as well as possible, but still it is necessary to learn the techniques from a guru who has had personal experience with the techniques. This is not only so in yoga, but with most sciences.

Throughout history, the yogic tradition and, of course, many other sciences have been passed on from guru to disciple.

However, in many cases and for various reasons, these traditions have been interrupted. There have been political upheavals, migrations and destruction. Many aggressive religions have destroyed the basis of other religions. Therefore, it is important that we do not rely on the guru-disciple tradition, but we should also have a scriptural tradition.

By scriptural tradition I mean the yoga that was recorded in the tantric scriptures. Today we are able to translate the teachings contained in these scriptures into the language of modern day man. Maybe after a hundred years or so, the writings of today will again be recast in another fashion according to the nature of the people who will exist then.

In the past, however, many scriptures were destroyed. For example, in the Sun Temple of the Incas, thousands of books were reduced to ashes. Books in other parts of the world have also met with the same fate, so we cannot rely on the scriptural tradition alone, nor can we only rely on the guru-disciple relationship. Therefore, a third tradition has to be established – the guru-student tradition.

I teach yoga to my disciples and they teach others. I write books on yoga which are read today and which will be rewritten after a few centuries. I am teaching yoga to you, and you will carry on the name of yoga for centuries and centuries, not the practices, not the science as a whole, but just the name of yoga. This is how the spiritual tradition of yoga has to be kept alive, keeping in mind that accidents can take place in history.

What does Swamiji expect from those he trains as yoga teachers?

Yoga is the nucleus of a coming civilization and yoga teachers will have to play a very prominent part in that coming event. The role of the yoga teacher is not like that of the music and dance teacher. The yoga teachers will be involved in the revival of the great values which are necessary for the illumination of man's spirit and essential for his survival.

In the past, yoga has always been a philosophy which has created geniuses and new ideas, forms and expressions. And

now scientists have found that the science of tantra, of which yoga is a branch, provides the most powerful and successful means of restructuring man's entire mind and body.

Yoga teachers, not only in Munger, but from all over India and abroad, must understand that they have to manifest in their lives the inner shakti and thus become the nucleus of the coming culture.

If yoga becomes a mighty world culture, can we expect an end to man's suffering and the evils of the world?

Many times this question has been put to me. Although yoga is going to become a mighty force at the end of this century and during the next, this does not mean that man will not fall ill, that rivalry will not take place, and that everyone will love each other. It does not mean there will be no hatred in the world, and that everybody will become happy and free from problems and disease.

According to the sages, there is a very clear concept that the world is a play of the three gunas. The three gunas are tamas, rajas and sattwa, and if you combine these stages, they create millions of things on the mental plane. Whether yoga becomes a mighty culture or not, they will still exist; they always remain the same. Diversity is the nature of the world. Yoga cannot go against it. There will be diverse religions and sects. There will still be wars and there will still be love, hatred and massacres. There will also be people like Buddha and Christ coming from time to time. You cannot go beyond all this because the world is the play of the three gunas.

You may envision an idyllic lifestyle and universal peace and harmony, but how can that be? There will always be grass, thorny bushes and snakes, and there will still be floods, droughts and epidemics if high blood pressure, cancer and rheumatism no longer exist. However, one great change will be brought about through the power of yoga. Yoga will bring light to man's thinking processes and will improve the quality of his thought and perception. Thereby it will enable him to understand the necessity of his problems. And this is what we are expecting.

2

Spiritual Life

Must the world be harmonious before spiritual life will come?

Material existence and spiritual life always coexist. Body, mind and spirit should evolve together. A few individuals are able to develop spiritually without material advancement, but this is not the path of the millions. Spiritual life should not be ignored for the sake of material life and material life should not be denounced for spiritual life.

Do you think that the world is preparing for an age of spiritual awakening?

People are becoming more and more aware of the need for spiritual life, but they lack guidance, inspiration and the means of transmission. The awakening is here, now, but from time to time it is oppressed. In the last twenty or thirty years, and particularly in the last decade, the awakening has been marvellous and voluntary. This is a direct contrast to previous generations when there was no choice; man was obliged to follow a path, whether he understood it or not.

Now, boys and girls and men and women of all ages are earnestly trying to discover a way for themselves, and this voluntary discovery of spiritual life, and acceptance of spiritual practices, is a very happy event of our time. If this awakening continues and the voluntary efforts to raise one's spiritual consciousness are genuine and honest, then we can definitely

reach the sublime heights of consciousness. Therefore, I always tell my disciples, "Do not seek wild publicity. If you do, you are compelling or convincing people. Then they are only accepting the way because they are impressed." True spiritual life is not an outcome of this kind of impression. Rather, it comes to you in a beautiful and concise way.

Even if spiritual life was not openly presented and there were no books and publicity materials, a general awakening in the masses would still be taking place. If you withdrew all the books and publicity and did not propagate spiritual life through newspapers or television, nevertheless the mass consciousness which is trying to evolve spiritually would discover its own way. Therefore, in our time, although we have been operating very silently and without much fuss, we still find people are in search of us. People are searching for good books on yoga and for good yoga teachers. They are looking for good systems, and this is a very positive sign of awakening.

One point should be very clear. While a spiritual institution or philosophy, or a religious institution or philosophy needs publicity, constant recognition, or whatever you might call it, the awakening of spiritual consciousness in everybody, en masse, does not need any publicity at all. If you want spiritual life, you must search and track it down. So let us try to create a situation where people remain seekers. Let them go to the gurus and teachers. Let them try different philosophies. Let them read books. I teach because you are searching. What are you searching for? You are searching for a way which will lead you towards the greater possibility which you have somehow realized in your mind. This type of voluntary awakening has been occurring increasingly over the last two or three decades.

Some people find it difficult to discover their duty in life. How can they find out what it is?

Fulfil your desires, that is the first step. This is what everybody has been doing and will continue to do. Some people feel that their duty is to bring forth children, educate them and carefully establish them in the world, and they keep

fulfilling this bond of duty. Is this really duty or is it their personal desire?

Once the mind is free of desire, duty is not relevant in life. As such, the concept of duty is very much dependent on man's personal desires and consequent attachments. His desires create certain social obligations, and when he becomes aware of his tremendous potentialities, then spiritual obligations press upon him. So man's duties have to be divided into two categories – social obligations and spiritual obligations, depending on your personal enlightenment about the truth.

According to yogic philosophy, an individual is obliged to express himself on account of his personal desires. And as a person evolves through life, the nature, the quality and the shape of his desires change. As such, the nature of his social and spiritual obligations will also change. What was twenty years back will not be twenty years later.

What is my duty? To serve my family, friends and children. Suppose there is a time when the concept of family is completely destroyed; when the concept of motherhood, fatherhood and the child is completely finished. If I ask myself at that time, "What is my duty?" and I give the same reply, "To serve my family," people will say, "What are you saying? Are you crazy? What is family?"

You may say your duty is to serve your nation – "I am an Indian and I have to serve my country and my people." This is all right for the present time, but in the next century what if the very idea of nation becomes obsolete? If there are no nations or no boundaries as such, you cannot say your duty is to serve your nation. Therefore, the concept of duty is relevant to the situation of the society and world of our time. It is not an absolute concept; it is very shallow and limited. Once this society disintegrates or reforms, then your obligations and duties will have to show a new face.

Behind the concept of duty is the idea of ownership. Man created the whole thing about duty in order to enslave himself and others. I may think I am the owner of my wife, but how can it be? I am really just her friend and companion. You

may think you are the owner of your son, but how can that be? You are just the mother, the caretaker. This idea of duty has been a very great hindrance in the spiritual as well as the social evolution of mankind.

Can the state of inner peace be achieved within the material world, or is it necessary to withdraw from it?

Peace has to be achieved within life, and life is based on matter. There is no possibility of withdrawing from life. You may be able to withdraw from the external aspects, but you cannot withdraw yourself from awareness of matter. This problem has been discussed by the great thinkers of India for the last five to ten thousand years, and as a result religions were formulated. Some thinkers have said, "Withdraw yourself and inner peace will come to you." But then what is the fun of having inner peace? Others have said, "Live in life and think that it is inner peace." How is this possible? Can peace be attained in the midst of disturbances?

If you have read the *Bhagavad Gita*, you will know that its whole theme is renunciation within action, attaining inner peace while performing one's duties. It is not possible to achieve inner peace by renouncing all karma. So long as the mind broods over the material pleasures which it is not experiencing, it is hypocritical. But if one is living life fully, and at the same time has defined one's relationship with material life, then one knows how far one can go. This is the yoga of active detachment.

Supposing you work in a bank and count money all day, how much you receive and how much you pay out does not affect you, even if the total is very great. But if you earn one hundred and fifty dollars a week, a little more or less will definitely affect you. What is personal affects you and what is impersonal does not affect you.

So, do not withdraw from life; live it fully. Fulfil your respective duties and inner peace will come to you. Accept whatever happens to you and maintain an impersonal and detached attitude. That is the whole secret of inner peace.

What keeps our divine consciousness suppressed?

Nothing keeps the divine consciousness suppressed, we just don't want to see, that's all. It is like the ostrich which buries its head in the sand when someone approaches. In the same manner the divine effulgence is self-existing, even now it is within me. It is the controller of all that is taking place in my life, but I'm so much engrossed in my own pranks and caught up in my web of maya that it is impossible for me to feel its presence.

Because I am interested in spiritual life, my family thinks I am about to become a sadhu. What can I do?

Well, this is always a problem. Often parents think about what would happen if their son took to a life of crime, and they worry needlessly about it. They have fears that their son might become a vagabond, and that is also a problem. Therefore, in my opinion, if your family thinks you are going to be a sadhu, they should be very happy. When a child wants to become a sadhu, sannyasin, politician, mountaineer, sportsman or anything else, the family should let him, and feel pleased that he has made an independent decision.

However, you can never please the family because its structure is based upon interdependence, not independence. In a family situation people should live together with total independence, but usually there is dominance by the old, who like to believe that the young know nothing and are useless and irresponsible.

Of course, I have given a lot of thought to the family structure and its variations from culture to culture, and I believe the family system that we have been following is a worn out system. It is not beneficial for our present day requirements, and that is why there is so much crime, tragedy, dissatisfaction and suppression in families. The husband, the dominant figure, is unhappy; the wife, the dominated figure, is unhappy; and the children, who are suppressed and disturbed, are also unhappy. Therefore, the husband is shouting, the wife is crying, the children are revolting, and ultimately some tragedy occurs.

Is belief in God and the offering of prayers essential for spiritual life?

It is not essential to have faith in God, but it is very difficult to live without faith. Even those people who profess to have no faith in God normally believe in something. To have faith in a higher or subtler state of existence, or to have faith in the basis of one's own existence, is to have faith in God. It does not necessarily have to be in the form of Rama, Krishna, or even your guru.

Would you please explain what it means to be given a spiritual name.

There was a man and his name was Fat Man, but he was very thin, so his name was not befitting his physical structure. Besides having a physical body, you also have a mind, senses, and different invisible bodies. The name written in your passport is for your visible body, but what is the name of the invisible bodies? These invisible bodies have a different character, weight and dimension from the physical body, and just as 'Fat Man' was not the right name for the lean man, the name in your passport is not the right name for your invisible self.

Your name has been given for social identification. If you don't have a name, what am I going to call you, Mr 1, 2, 3, or 4? Your name is for convenience, but a spiritual name is not for convenience. It denotes one's personality, invisible structure, and unseen bodies.

If you receive a spiritual name from a guru, or from anybody else, that is the name of your inner self, your homogeneous being.

When a person has chosen the spiritual path and he meets many difficulties, how can they be overcome?

When you have taken to the spiritual path, you should expect obstacles because you are not yet perfect. Until you have become perfect, the imperfect mind will be with you, and it is the imperfect mind which creates the obstacles. These obstacles manifest in the form of distractions, passions, desires, guilt,

etc. They are all the offspring of the mind, and until you are able to purify your mind, you will continue to have obstacles on your path, whatever that path might be.

Once you have chosen the spiritual path, no matter what obstacles you meet, you must continue towards your goal. Do not retrace your steps for any reason. If you look at the obstacles objectively, you will see that they are actually stepping stones. Any mistake you make provides you with experience so that when you meet the same obstacle again, you will know how to deal with it.

Another point is that on the spiritual path an aspirant is involuntarily subjected to a purging process. Just as you practise shankhaprakshalana to cleanse the physical body, in the same way the consciousness has to be purged of its animal tendencies; the experiences of instinctive life. They are always there, but during the course of your sadhana they manifest in the form of jealousy, anger, greed, passion and so on. You think they are obstacles, but they are not; they are nature's way of purging out the dirt. This process is always going on in life, but as you proceed further in spiritual life, this purging might become so acute that it smells foul and one feels very bad about oneself. He feels dirty, repulsive and completely hopeless. He says, "What terrible things I am thinking. Oh God! I do not want all this."

Are these obstacles? No. During the spiritual ascent whatever experiences you have, negative or positive, are nothing but part of the cleansing process. When you experience them, you are passing through what is called 'purgatory'. It is a natural process. Let it happen.

In the West, is there a danger that true seekers can be misguided by false prophets of eastern mysticism?

There is always danger in every culture, however great it might be, in every movement, however genuine and beneficial it might be to humanity. Just as a big tree gives shelter to benign birds, the shade of the tree can also give shelter to dacoits and bandits.

Can a person reach spiritual realization without practising yoga?

Evolution is a natural process in the vegetable, animal and human kingdoms. You are going to reach the ultimate point of evolution, but it will take many thousands of years. If you have the patience to wait and see, then yoga is not necessary. But man is impatient, he wants to accelerate the pace of his evolution, and therefore he has tried different methods to arrive at that final point of spiritual realization. In this, he discovered that yoga is the surest and quickest way to accelerate the natural pace of evolution. Therefore, one can reach realization without yoga, but if one practises one can reach it much sooner.

Supposing a woman wants to live a spiritual life but her husband doesn't, should she totally accept his decision or pressure him to change?

All people are different and this attempt to change the other partner is not a very good idea. It is a western idea. In India we do not believe in it. Each partner has his own spiritual or non-spiritual attitudes. But in western cultures there is a tendency to see things only in one's own particular way. People feel that everybody should have their religion, their way of thinking. This type of thing has been going on in the world for the last two thousand years or more. It creates a very successful organization, institution or government, but it is most detrimental to spiritual growth because we are all different, and our spiritual growth, and consequently our lifestyles, can't be exactly the same.

In India, if the wife worships Shiva and the husband is an atheist, the wife doesn't try to make him religious and he doesn't try to make her an atheist. If the husband is non-vegetarian and the wife is totally vegetarian, she will cook meat for him, but she will not eat it. She will not compel him to change his diet and he will not expect her to change. Everyone has to grow in their own lifestyle. Harmony is not in unity, it is in perfect adjustment in rhythm and style.

If there is only one sound in a piano, you can't create music. There have to be different sounds and octaves, and you have to know how to produce harmonious music from them. In the same way, you should have your own religious and spiritual lifestyle and let your husband have his own. Understanding is much better than conversion, and after all, what is understanding? It is love. If there is no understanding, there is no love.

If the husband is a heavy drinker, the wife has to understand it. If the wife has her own indulgences, the husband has to understand it. You have to put yourself in the other person's place, then you will understand why he behaves as he does. That's how to bring about happiness, harmony and growth between two people who live close together.

Is the study of subjects such as tarot, astrology and palmistry related in any way to one's spiritual growth?

Surely! They develop one's faith in spiritual entities, spiritual processes and invisible powers. Therefore, they are related.

How can one know which stage of spiritual development one is at?

Because spiritual life is invisible, it is very difficult for one to know where he stands. Once you have come to the point of self-realization, then it is easy for you to know where you are. But during the course of spiritual life, when you are facing so many different problems and obstacles, and simultaneously having certain achievements, it is difficult to know exactly where you are.

Not only is it difficult, it is also dangerous and disastrous to try and estimate where you stand in spiritual evolution. Many people do it and they develop certain mental errors. Either they begin to think that they are gods or they retreat because they don't think they are getting anywhere. So, one should not try to judge one's own evolution; it is neither necessary nor possible. And the desire to know the point of your spiritual development is not a spiritual desire.

Another important point is that most people are trying to evolve in spiritual life without realizing that this is the ultimate destiny of mankind. We may strive for spiritual evolution with the expectation of positive results, but what we define as positive may, in fact, be negative in spiritual life. What is your definition of ananda? It may not be the correct definition. In your mind you may have a clear picture of spiritual evolution, but if it is based on your religious conditioning, it may not be correct. You have to break free from your conditioning and your expectations; only then will you be able to liberate your mind.

Today, if you try to assess your spiritual progress, you'll be disappointed because you are desiring money and pleasure, and your religion says these attachments are bad. So, on the basis of your religion, you have not progressed, although from another point of view maybe you have. What is going to decide whether you are spiritually evolved? You may say psychic visions or inner sounds, but is this correct? You can inject a hormone and have these experiences. Maybe you are able to perform some miracles, to heal someone or to make predictions, but is that progress in spiritual life? Any magician can do the same.

You may behave nicely, you may be very humble and courteous, but there are thousands of people who can act like this. Even if you slap them, they will say, "Thank you." If you don't react to insults, if nothing disturbs or affects you, is this spiritual progress? Politicians can face insults. You can beat, abuse or scandalize them, yet nothing affects them. Does this mean they are spiritually evolved? No, they have just trained themselves to behave in a particular manner; it's part of their policy.

If you are religious, follow certain ethics and morals, it does not necessarily mean you are spiritual. Conversely, if you have a business, home and family, it does not mean you are not spiritual. Religion belongs to the mind and intellect; ethics and morality belong to the society, but spiritual evolution belongs to the self, not the body. Spiritual evolution is just

awareness and the growth of awareness is very slow. Spiritual development is like the gradual emotional and intellectual growth of a child. A child knows nothing when he is young, but as he matures he acquires knowledge of emotions and passions through having experienced them. So, once you have realized what spiritual life is, then you can wonder about your progress.



3

Health and Healing

What is disease?

Disease is a condition experienced in the body but existing in the mind. According to the yogic concept, disease is inherent in the deeper self, but we are not sensitive to this so it is experienced through the mind and the senses in the body. All diseases, whether they concern the digestive, respiratory or circulatory systems, are due to carelessness about the rules of health.

What role has yoga to play in disease?

There are many mental and physical diseases in the modern communities in which we live. Most of the major diseases such as nervous depression, heart disease, cancer, etc., have emerged with industrialization in the last fifty to one hundred years. Our grandfathers worked in small shops, out in the fields and so on. But now, if our children are going to work in the rolling mill, they have to deal with the tax department, banks, government, consumers, exporters and other such agencies. They spend their whole life at it. This did not happen before. When they come home at night, they cannot sleep because their minds are very active with the problems confronting them. This is what western societies have been facing with increasing intensity for several decades.

The new diseases that are arising are due to the restless and anxious mind. No medicine can ever tackle them. Even if you give a new system to society, which you cannot do in a year

or even twenty years, still these disease patterns will continue. They are part and parcel of the pace of modern life. The only way out of the problems is through yoga. That is why western societies have taken to yoga, not because yoga was something new. They have their own religion and culture and are very proud of it, but still they have their own problems for which yoga is providing an effective solution. These are the same problems which are increasing in India day by day as well.

Your great-grandfather did not think as much as you do. The speed of the mind is greater today than it was two or three generations ago, so naturally your diseases will be different from those of your great-grandfather.

How can we manage the mental problems which arise in daily life? Of course, karma yoga is one way. It is a way of life. Everybody has to work, so everybody can practise karma yoga. But if any mental or emotional problem arises in life, how can one make it subside if one is not a jnani? If one possesses *jnana*, spiritual knowledge, then by one's own thinking one will be able to regain balance. But this is not possible for one who is not a jnani. Therefore, in yoga there are physical as well as mental practices by which you can control the malfunctioning of the body. For those who are dedicated to spiritual life, there are so many different forms of religion and worship, so they are well provided for. But for people who are suffering mentally, physically and emotionally, and are beyond the range of medical treatment, yoga has something valuable to offer.

Can modern man really benefit by practising the yogic techniques that were developed centuries ago?

In today's civilized society, man's complexes and neuroses have greatly increased. Centuries ago our ancestors had a more conducive environment for the practice of yoga, but their need for the science was not as great as it is in today's confused and neurotic world.

On the physical level, we are subjected to a polluted and unharmonious environment in which the laws of nature are

not respected. Our body takes in many toxins from the atmosphere and the food we eat, and we must have a process for purging these accumulated impurities. Yoga is the only science which has provided the means. In hatha yoga there are practices to purify the stomach and the whole alimentary canal. Pranayama purifies and balances the respiratory and nervous systems, and asanas, mudras and bandhas release energy blocks and help to build up the body's vitality and resistance.

On the mental plane, the worries, fears, anxieties and tensions that man experiences in his daily life all create an accumulation of impurities in the subconscious mind. To expel these toxins and to rid oneself of tension, one has to practise meditation and yogic relaxation on a regular basis.

So, although the yogic practices were developed centuries ago, it does not mean that they are unsuitable for modern day people. In fact, those who are living a life of greater stress and tension will realize the benefits of yoga sooner than they did in previous cultures.

What is the best treatment for serious diseases of the body?

Chronic and constitutional diseases can be efficiently managed by the practices of hatha yoga. Diseases that are purely physical in nature can be directly tackled by asanas, pranayama and the six body cleansing kriyas. However, when the cause is not in the body but in the depths of the mind, it will have to be tackled by the practices of raja yoga coupled with hatha yoga. Diseases such as cancer are born of your mind, but manifest in the body over a long period of time.

I will give you an example. If a man in his sixties suddenly loses his nineteen-year-old son, it will definitely be a great shock. The effects of this shock are transferred to the unconscious mind and there they lie working like a seed underneath the earth. In all cases this is the normal reaction to shock. Every experience in life becomes integrated into your personality and becomes active like a seed sown in the ground.

It is not seen, but it continues to grow until it manifests at the body level. Anything that happens to the body affects the mind and anything which affects the mind affects the body, and this includes severe diseases such as asthma, cancer and diabetes.

Even people who have been suffering for twenty-five years from diseases such as asthma and mental disorders show great improvement after fifteen to twenty days of yogic treatment. They think it is a miracle, but the reason why the yogic practices are so powerful is because they work on the unconscious mind and root out the real cause of disease.

Because disease can manifest on account of mental or physical causes, it is best to practise the techniques of hatha yoga and raja yoga together. A person could be suffering from asthma because the climate where he lives does not suit him and he has developed an allergy which has resulted in asthma. Or maybe he has certain suppressions in his mind which have been carried on from childhood and are causing all his suffering.

What is yogic research showing?

Research on the effects of yogic practices on the human mind and body has been going on in both eastern and western countries since the 1960s. These research studies have revealed that yoga is not what we had been thinking, in terms of some kind of great mysticism, but that it is first and foremost a logical and systematic science.

Numerous studies have now revealed the profound effects of yogic techniques upon the cardiovascular, respiratory, nervous and endocrine systems, and as a result many physicians and healers are now incorporating yogic techniques, along with other measures, in the management of their patients' diseases. Simultaneously, investigation of the practices of yogic pranayama and meditation has shown that these are often very useful in the management of various mental disorders, including depression, emotional instability and anxiety neurosis.

As a spin-off of these studies, the yogic practices are now being effectively adapted in many areas of social and community health, including drug addiction, alcoholism, juvenile delinquency, marital disharmony and rehabilitation of prisoners. The task today is to tell the people of the world, especially the educated and professional classes, that much work has already been done in the field of yoga research, and with it has come an altogether unexpected revelation about the potentialities of yoga in relation to mind, man and society as a whole.

With this in mind, we started the Bihar School of Yoga in 1964, and with the help of a few sannyasins we have been able to do much in the past sixteen years to propagate this scientific explanation of yoga. Both within and beyond India, we have been able to convince most thinking people about the positive and practical contribution of yoga.

At Bihar School of Yoga, the research coordinating centre is collecting research data material on yoga from all over the world on the experiments being carried out in Russia, Poland, France, Germany, the USA and Australia, as well as within India. These studies are being conducted into various aspects of yoga, not only the physical, and it is necessary to print all of these findings for the general public who do not follow scientific journals and publications. Nobody has been doing this work. Nobody even knows what is being done in the hundreds of research centres all over the world. Neither the press nor the public are aware of it. All this information has to be compiled and presented to people, because they should know that there is definitely a higher science existing in India today which has been utterly neglected for so many centuries.

The implications of this yogic research for our society are far reaching. In many countries outside India, yoga is now being taught to hardened and committed criminals and to patients in mental hospitals. It is also being taught to police and army cadets, business executives, students, drug addicts and hospital patients. It has been found to be not only working well, but it is working much better than they expected.

Can we modify our genes through yoga so that we do not transmit hereditary diseases to our offspring?

Healthy reproduction is not just a matter of not transmitting such diseases, but it is also a question of creating a new human personality. With the practices of yoga we can definitely influence the genes. A lot is being said about genetic engineering in scientific circles, and scientists are now able to synthesize and alter the genes of some bacteria. Similarly, the concept of positively altering our genes by the power of sustained positive thinking is under debate by psychologists.

According to yogic science, the whole human physical and psychological framework can be systematically overhauled, and harmful or negative impressions or *samskaras*, including genetic ones, can be uprooted by the practice of yogic kriyas and meditation. As a result, the quality of mankind's collective gene pool will steadily and spontaneously improve as many more individuals adopt yoga as a means of transforming their psychophysiological apparatus and elevating themselves beyond personal limitations.

What is the relationship between the ancient sciences of ayurveda, rasayana and tantra yoga?

In India we have four Vedas and these are accepted as the oldest written books in the library of mankind. They are estimated to have been written five thousand years ago. The last Veda, chronologically, is known as *Atharva Veda*. This is a very rich Veda containing so many different sciences, not only ayurveda, rasayana and tantra, but archery, siddha yoga, medicine and many more. It also contains the sciences of hypnotism and magic. All these sciences form an integral part of the *Atharva Veda*.

Ayurveda means the science of life. It is not the science of medicine. Our modern science is known as medical science because it studies diseases and talks about medicines and drugs that can be used in their treatment. However, ayurveda talks not of medicines and diseases, but of the lifespan itself

and how to enhance it. *Ayur* in Sanskrit means life. If I am sixty years old, they will say my ayur is sixty. It means that the life I have gone through is sixty years.

Veda means knowledge or science. The purpose of ayurveda was to give man a science to improve his life at every stage. This science developed and evolved in India over many centuries. They picked up the knowledge of an infinite number of herbs from the Himalayas, and these herbs are still used today. They utilized the ashes of herbs and plants as well. Then, somewhat later, they began to burn metals like gold and silver and they used their ashes therapeutically. This particular branch of ayurveda turns metals into *bhasma*, ash. This was a very special science in ancient India, and even today it is very much alive. It is a secret but very simple system in which no electricity or modern appliances are needed. First an earthen vessel is prepared, just as refractory bricks are used in furnaces today. The gold is placed in the vessel and then the whole thing is sealed and put into a fire for a number of hours. When they remove the vessel and open it up, the ashes are ready.

What is the use of taking gold ashes internally? Well, gold is a most beautiful and enduring substance. It is non-reactive, it will never tarnish, corrode or decay. Gold is an immortal, ageless metal. If you can wear gold for beauty, then perhaps you can eat it also!

The science of rasayana arose as another system capable of beneficially influencing the health of mankind. This is the system of basic chemistry in each and everything, and this science is still known to this day.

At the same time, Indians came to understand that diseases often live in this body but they are not from the body. The diseases originate from karma. Certain diseases originate on account of your nature and temperament. Others stem from emotional reactions. For example, inherent fear can create a physical disease like a tumour. In the same way anxiety can kill a person due to heart attack, jealousy can create amoebic dysentery and suppression of passion can

create hyperacidity. The origin of disease is a subtle and complicated study that is often difficult to pinpoint with complete accuracy.

It is true that some physical diseases are due to deficiencies in the body, but that alone is not the end of the story. Therefore, the science of tantra was gradually discovered and evolved. It provided a means of overhauling the whole inner mind and inner body. As time passed, Hindus came to know more and more about the real nature and origins of man's sufferings. They realized that there was not just one but seven bodies, gross and subtle. Now if you have only one body, ayurvedic medicine will definitely suffice to make you disease free. But you have more than one body and each has its own nature of disease.

Supposing I have lost my beloved, my nearest and dearest one, and I don't sleep by day or night. What can poor ayurveda do? This is why modern medical science has failed, and this is why drugs and medicines often prove inefficacious. It is because the other bodies are sick. The problem lies beyond the realm of the physical body.

So tantra is the basic science of all man's bodies. It takes care of them all. Therefore ayurveda, rasayana, siddha yoga and tantra are all supplementary and complementary sciences. As such, we do not believe in comparison. We believe in the complementary. If this is good and that is good, and both are combined, good plus good will be even better.

Should we practise amaroli? How do we do it and what are its benefits?

Many people have been asking about amaroli. In the last few years I have seen the effects of amaroli on cancer patients and I have not yet seen any failures. I have written a small book on amaroli which is perhaps the only scientific manual on the subject so far. The practice of amaroli should be done under the instruction of a qualified person who knows about it.

The method of taking amaroli is different from person to person. In some cases the fresh substance should be taken

and in others the preserved substance. Sometimes only the first urine of the day is taken, and in other cases it is taken up to lunchtime. In the case of fast growing diseases like cancer, we tell the patient to take everything. But those who practise all day must discontinue the practice for one hour before and three hours after lunch.

Amaroli becomes very powerful if you take care of your diet. Whatever purpose you use it for, you must avoid protein diet of every nature and it is also best to avoid too much sweet, sour, salty, spicy or pungent food. Raw food will help you in every sphere of disease and some fruits such as bananas, papaya and citrus fruits are very good in the practice of amaroli. Remember that raw foods have better value for building up the bodily resistance and fighting disease. Those who practise amaroli should also make an application on the head and the soles of the feet. That is to say, you have to anoint the head and feet. This is a very common rule. In the same way even in the Bible it is written, "Drink the water of your own cistern."

For centuries amaroli has been used, not only for fighting disease, but also for creating the situation for samadhi and tantric achievement. When you practise meditation for long hours, the inner body temperature falls. Under such circumstances, the practice of amaroli maintains the digestive system.

When you practise meditation, there is an effect on the cardiovascular system. The blood pressure can drop suddenly. If it falls gradually, it does not matter much, but if it falls rapidly, it adversely affects the cardiovascular system. Amaroli safeguards against this. When you practise meditation properly, you should take amaroli for this reason. Scientific discoveries have revealed that amaroli contains up to twenty-four distinct groups of hormones, of which certain ones are important for maintaining the health of the heart. You can say that this is a form of nutrition for the cardiovascular system. The alternative is some drug or medicine. This is why advanced yogis took to the practice of amaroli.

Female yogis also practised amaroli because long-term use of amaroli influences the levels of prostaglandin hormones in the system. These are the hormones which kill the eggs or ova before they have matured.

When you practise yoga, and especially hatha yoga, all the impurities are thrown out of the body. When the body is pure, its power of immunity is lost. So a yogi can sometimes suffer from contagious diseases because his system contains fewer antibodies, due to his purifying practices. So amaroli was practised by the great yogis to maintain a system of anti-toxic antibodies in the body. If they remained in a cave for three months, nothing happened to them, but if an ordinary person did this, he would get a lot of skin problems.

So, if you want to practise amaroli, you must find someone to teach you. The practice will differ from person to person, but I will tell you how to start. Have a simple fast for one day, not necessarily a total fast. You can take fruit juice and raw or boiled vegetables; however, a total fast is better. If your intestines are not clean, empty them by enema or glycerine suppository. If you know the short version of shankhaprakshalana, which can be done by taking six glasses of warm salty water, that's the best way.

Next morning when you get up, take the midstream of the first urine. This is enough to start with, and you can continue taking this for one month. If you don't have any positive or negative reaction, then start to use the second urine also, sipping a little water in between. Don't drink the water, only sip a little, not more than half a cup. Continue twice per day for another month. During this time you will definitely have either a positive or negative reaction. If it is positive, increase the intake to a third time each day, sipping water in between. If there is a negative reaction, find out what it is due to, perhaps improper diet or you may be suffering from some disease. Then reduce to the previous quantity.

In my opinion, three rounds are sufficient. Continue this for many months. Then once in a year or so, leave your home and stay alone somewhere in the countryside, fix your diet

and practise amaroli the whole day for one week. If there is a positive reaction every day, continue. If there is a slight negative reaction, go back to the stage up to which you did not get the reaction. You will not have any problem then.

You have only to eliminate the excessive protein from the diet and continue this practice with total patience. Even if it takes one, two or three years to get used to amaroli, it is a rewarding practice, which will help you in meditation and also in maintaining good health.

How can we utilize colours for healing?

In colour therapy, the best colour is geru, or soft orange. The next best is white, then yellow and green. In the treatment of mental and physical diseases, other colours can also be used in the form of clothing, flowers, foods, etc. Another method is to place pure water in a coloured bottle, seal it, then expose it to sunlight every day. After one week it will be charged with the solar energy filtered through the colours. Water charged in this way is used in cases of diarrhoea, inflammation and coughs and colds.

Colours have a definite effect on the human body, mind and emotions, and colour therapy has been used successfully in the treatment of many mental patients.

I find I can sometimes heal people through the power of thought. Do you think it is good to do this?

There is a natural law that nature takes its own time and course. If a person has a disease, it is due to his karma, his way of life, the nature of his mind. The disease is due to passions, frustrations and emotions in him. If you are able to cure him, you are only suppressing the disease because the cause still remains unchanged; the same nature, the same thinking, the same shortcomings in life. When that could produce a disease previously, it can surely create disease again. In the course of my own spiritual life, I have found that if the psychic capacities can cure the cause, they are good. But if they only cure the symptoms or the manifestations, they are of no real

use, because the disease or unhappiness will return just as before. However, if you are able to change the whole direction of the person's thinking, transform his consciousness, recast the whole mind and brain into a new pattern, then psychic powers are useful.

Christ, who performed so many miracles, had eleven or twelve disciples. What did one of the disciples do? He betrayed Christ and Christ was crucified. And what about the rest? When the cock crowed, another disowned him thrice. When Christ was resurrected, he met one of the disciples on the way to the village. He revealed his identity and showed the stigmata, and the disciple ran away. He was afraid of political execution. When Christ was in the boat, he asked Peter to walk on the water. After walking half way, his faith faltered and he began to sink.

The point is, what was the purpose of performing so many miracles when even the nearest of his disciples could not believe, not to talk of Roman emperors? We are talking of those disciples who lived with him, saw him curing lepers and blessing prostitutes, and witnessed hundreds of people being healed by him. But when the test finally came, in a moment they were off. Their faith was baseless because they were drawn to him mainly because he had psychic powers. They made him their guru because he had powers. Therefore, they did not change their own natures. This can happen to anybody, not just to Jesus Christ. This can happen to me also.

What is healing? If healing is aimed at relieving the suffering of others, is there spiritual growth by either the patient or the healer?

In the process of healing, you charge the sick person with extra energy, either from your personality, your body, or your self, or you increase their energy so that the energy can come back to you with the situation of the sickness. In either case, if your system of healing does not give the sufferer a spiritual direction, then that healing has no ultimate purpose.

When you prescribe medicine for a patient he takes it and he feels alright. His symptoms disappear. Here, the medicine

only cures the sickness, it does not give a spiritual direction to the patient's personality and mind. Also, it is necessary for the healer to have a personal spiritual direction and to work towards the correction of his own habits of thinking and living.

What are the different systems of psychic healing?

There are three systems: hypnosis or psychological healing, spiritual healing and pranic healing. Of these three, pranic healing is the most scientific and yet it is spiritual at the same time.

The greatest drawback of the psychological system of healing is that after a patient has been put under hypnosis for a certain period, a hypnotic pressure or influence is exerted on the personality and the ego. This means that there is constant conflict within the individual because of the processes of hypnosis. After a while the personality becomes very aggressive and abnormal.

The second category is spiritual healing, in which extraneous spirits are invoked to help in the process. This system is very common in the West as well as the East. However, it can bring some other disease in its wake because karma cannot be avoided; it has to be suffered and experienced.

The third and most sublime system is prana vidya in which the vital energy in the body is amplified and directed.

Can you heal people through prana vidya?

Yes, I can cure people, but I don't do these things. My way of working is entirely different; I have my own system. The science of healing is considered to be a lower science.

Is the energy which acupuncture manipulates the same energy as that used by faith healers?

No, the processes are different. Acupuncturists use the nadis; ida and pingala, as we know them in yoga, and the pranic energy and the mental energy which flows through these two channels. In the process of healing the disease by faith, you

use a deeper, greater and more powerful energy. The energy which is awakened by faith is a higher quality of energy than the energies which are either blocked, or which are freed during acupuncture procedures.

Anyone can heal; one doesn't have to be at a particular stage of spiritual development to accomplish healing. There are some people who have that constituent very predominant in their nature, but actually everybody can heal.

Is there a different attitude to schizophrenia in the western and Asian societies?

First of all, in western countries schizophrenia is quite common, whereas in Asia it is not much of a problem. Schizophrenia is the end result of a split in the personality due to conflicts. In western society there are major gaps between beliefs and realities and, as a result, in the mind of a westerner there is always a conflict of some description going on. For example, there are many people who believe that smoking causes cancer, but on account of inner conflicts they still continue to smoke. In Asia this is not the case. If a person believes that smoking causes cancer, he will leave it. In the West there are many conflicting ideologies. If you study the ideas of Freud, Jung and Adler, your intellect and beliefs will be torn apart. In Asia it is different. If there is one thought or belief, it is followed and the others are disregarded.

The amount of schizophrenia in a country reveals its cultural, religious and social patterns. The mental condition of its individuals indicates the faults within a socio-cultural system. But this does not mean that the European system is faulty and Asia is faultless, because each society has its own problems.

Due to hereditary and other factors, deformities occur in our children. How does the East react to this sort of thing and how can we help the victims accept it?

Hindus have a very scientific and organized society. Accordingly, their reaction towards suffering children is very uniform. The birth of a child to a Hindu family is accepted as a blessing

from God. If a woman is unable to conceive, she considers herself very unfortunate. She will go to any extent to conceive a child, either by taking a swami's blessing, or by resorting to tantra or magic. Children born handicapped are loved as though they were normal. The thought that the child is useless and its life should be terminated by an injection or other means is a totally unaccepted concept in India.

But even the organized and well-knit Hindu society members are not always able to shelter these handicapped children. Due to poverty or the untimely death of parents, they are often thrown out to the winds. Political problems in neighbouring countries often cause an influx of handicapped children also. But such handicapped children are all over the world as well.

In Germany some years ago, many children were handicapped by the drug thalidomide. That was a tragedy, no doubt. However, only if we have a rich government or a highly organized social structure can we take care of these cases. Otherwise we can only give them our compassion. There is such a vast number of handicapped children throughout the world that we may have to make a separate nation for them. We must also consider all the mentally retarded children in the world. I think there are just as many in the East as in the West.

Parents, and to some extent medical science, are responsible for these children. Over-medication has a debilitating effect, while hormonal treatment taken by parents definitely affects a child. However, suffering in children is also undoubtedly partly due to the karma in their past incarnations. These children suffer as a result of a combined karma. They suffer their own karma, that of their parents, and also that of society.

We must devise a different method to give practical shape to our compassion for these children. There are disorders that cannot be cured, but there are other diseases that are partly or completely curable. We must attempt to separate and classify them in order to effectively alleviate their problems. Many cases of psychologically or emotionally retarded children or

physically incapacitated children can be taught yoga which will improve their minds, their attitudes and their personal conditions. Many blind people have been great poets or sportsmen. Similarly, the physical infirmities of a child can become unimportant if we can rejuvenate his spiritual, psychic and intellectual potential.

In my opinion, handicapped children should be exposed to the benedictions and influence of yoga. Bring out the poet, the musician, scientist or swami in them. After all, it does not matter if you have no feet or your spinal cord is deformed or you are dumb, as long as you have a mind and consciousness. Yoga can then work and make something out of these atrophies. After all, mind is more important than body.



4

Physical Health

How long after a surgical operation on any part of the abdomen should one wait before commencing the practice of asanas?

In the case of any operation it is always safer to wait for three to six months before commencing yogasanas or other exercises. But there are certain minor operations where you can begin yogasanas within two or three months. This applies to the practice of major asanas such as bhujangasana, shalabhasana, sirshasana, sarvangasana or surya namaskara. Light movements such as pawanmuktasana can always be done under proper guidance.

Does stiffness in the body reflect stiffness in the mind? I have been practising yoga for five years but I still have persevering stiffness in my back. What can I do?

Stiffness of the body can be caused by stiffness of the mind, but there are other factors which may be responsible. One is excess calcium in the bones. Of course, calcium is a necessary ingredient in the body, but excessive calcium is definitely harmful. Decalcification is also a very dangerous disease. When your body and bones have extra calcium, the bones and tissues become stiff and lose their natural flexibility. Later on, there is artificial formation of bone due to extra calcium, and when there is artificial formation of bone in a joint, there is pain. That is known as arthritis.

Another cause of stiffness in the body occurs when various other foreign substances are deposited in the joint spaces. These can be the toxins from bacterial infections, or they can be the residues from drugs which are taken for some other complaint and are not fully eliminated from the bloodstream. Many of the preservatives and chemicals used in modern processed foods also produce stiffness or arthritis in this way. Similarly, a diet in which too much protein in the form of meat and eggs is taken overtaxes the body's ability to eliminate the breakdown products of protein such as uric acid. These substances then find their way into the joint spaces and pain results.

To maintain a flexible body, these metabolic products and poisons must be promptly eliminated from the system, and that requires sound digestion. Many people who complain of stiffness are suffering from constipation of the long term type. As a result, they are not eliminating these metabolic wastes efficiently and the blood, tissues and joints are full of these wastes. Once constipation is eliminated by *laghoo shankhaprakshalana*, and sluggish circulation of body fluids is rebalanced by *asanas* such as *pawanmuktasana*, symptoms of arthritis often disappear.

Another important factor is that hardening or stiffness of the spinal cord could be due to some genetic reason. I have made a detailed study of the structure of the spinal column in various races and have found that there are many different types. In people of primitive tribes, if you take your thumb along their spinal cords, you will find a single straight depression right from the bottom to the top. If you do the same thing on your spinal column, you will find the different obstacles and discs opposing on your thumb. Whereas Africans have a spinal cord almost in two curves, most Europeans have an almost straight spinal cord with only one slight bend backwards.

I have seen that people of Slavic origin have a particular kind of spinal curvature from the neck, then thoracic and then lumbar regions, right down to the sacral and iliac joints of the pelvis. Indians have a wide variety of spinal columns,

while Spanish people have a different type again. Almost all Australians have very badly aligned spinal columns. They are most unartistic. I tell Australians, “Well, you have a good heart but a very bad spinal column.” So stiffness of the spinal column could also be due to genetic factors.

How to make the spine and other joints supple? Practise pawanmuktasana, marjariasana and bhujangasana, and purify your diet, bringing down the calcium intake. Take care whenever you exercise the spinal column. Give it very mild exercise. When you practise asanas, forward bending and backward bending postures must be balanced by each other. If you can't practise chakrasana, it does not matter. You can practise bhujangasana, shalabhasana, paschimottanasana, ardha matsyendrasana and many other asanas. Often I have seen people practising bhujangasana without bending at all. From the waist to the neck is a straight line. But it does not really matter if you have a stiff body, but please don't have a stiff mind. That is a far greater limitation in life.

What yoga practices are effective for an aching back?

You must practise the asanas for the spinal column, which should be done gently in the beginning. There are many causes of backache, including poor posture, nervous tension and general stiffness. Supta vajrasana, marjariasana, vyaghrasana, tadasana, kati chakrasana and ardha matsyendrasana are amongst the most helpful asanas in these cases. However, if the trouble is due to slipped disc, advasana and makarasana are the best.

In the case of slipped disc or sciatica, only backward bending asanas are advised. How long should you do them for to avoid over-practise and an increase of pain?

For sciatica, vajrasana can be practised for as long as you can manage it. Makarasana can be practised for hours together. In the beginning, the other backward bending asanas such as bhujangasana and shalabhasana should be done very carefully for a minimum period of time.

Can curvature of the spine be corrected by yoga? Would kundalini still be able to rise?

At an early age before the bones are finally formed the posture can be corrected, but I don't think it is possible after eighteen to twenty years of age. The practices are very simple ones such as pawanmuktasana, bhujangasana, shalabhasana, gomukhasana and paschimottanasana.

In short, yes, the kundalini can still rise. In America the roads are straight, but in Spain there are many curves. However, the traffic still flows along all the roads. In America the cars travel straight and in Spain they go zigzag. So, whether you have a Spanish or an American spinal column, the kundalini can still awaken and ascend.

How can I clear a blocked nose?

If your nose is blocked due to a cold, you can do jala neti, followed by pranayama. If the problem is due to malformation of the septum, sutra neti is useful, but if the passage is blocked so much that the sutra cannot pass through, then it can be corrected by a minor operation. However, that is seldom necessary. If you practise jala neti or sutra neti daily, and follow it with bhastrika pranayama, that is usually enough. Kunjal is not necessary, but sometimes it does help clear a blocked nose. Follow the practices of hatha yoga and you will get rid of this problem.

What causes allergy and what can we do to eliminate the symptoms? Will yoga nidra help?

Allergies are due to an imbalance or hypersensitivity in the nervous system. Overactive responses of the nervous system and the temperature control mechanism of the brain to particular sensory stimuli are responsible for allergic symptoms. As a result you have skin, nose and food allergies or sensitivities. But if you go deeper you will come to realize that besides these, there are other forms of allergy and sensitivity as well. After all, whenever the senses act in repugnance, that is also a kind of allergy. When the nose reacts repugnantly to a smell,

it is a smell allergy. The most common of all allergies is the nasal allergy. If you smell coal, tar or petrol fumes, you may experience an allergy. When you smell certain flowers and the nose resists repugnantly, that's another type of allergy.

I have been thinking about this subject and have come to realize that there are many other forms of sensitivity or allergy which we do not recognize as such. We are allergic to certain noises and we feel pain in both temples. We are allergic to certain people and we hate them. We are allergic to certain situations in life and avoid them at all costs. Therefore, allergies should not be confined only to those that are recognized by the doctors.

Many years ago I had a peculiar allergy. Whenever I met finely and fashionably dressed people, I was allergic to them. It was so repugnant that I really suffered. We are therefore talking of different forms of allergy. Basically then, allergy is a mental attitude, but definitely the physical body has something to contribute. Our unbalanced, preprogrammed mental attitude causes excessive nervous activity when we are exposed to a particular stimulus, and that triggers an excessive reaction of our immune response system. As a result, too much histamine or other allergic chemicals are released into our tissues and blood and we have an attack of sneezing, we begin to wheeze, our eyes start watering or we develop urticaria or skin rash and so on.

To overcome a smell allergy you should practise neti and pranayama daily and also sirshasana if you can do it well. Certainly yoga nidra will help you to overcome specific prejudices and hypersensitive states, but it is not really necessary to use yoga nidra to overcome allergy. It is much better to realize and treat the very nature of repugnance which is natural to the untrained mind.

When I was eight years old, I saw human filth somewhere on the road in the early morning. I got an optic allergy. I had a little sty on the eyelid and I did not know the cause, but it went away in the course of time. Every time I saw human filth, the sty returned. However, I don't get it anymore. So, you

see, the mind and the nervous system have to be trained. It is a process of consciously desensitizing yourself to the sensory experiences which are repugnant to you. All these sensations pass through the nervous system to the brain where they are then conducted and communicated back into the immune response system which causes a reaction somewhere in the physical body. This link can be consciously altered by desensitization training.

I had another experience. In the Himalayas there is a place known as the Valley of Flowers. The whole valley has a vast variety of blooms. In August, September and October you'll go crazy at the sight of them. The whole valley, for miles and miles, is nothing but beautiful, exotic and diverse flowers. I happened to smell some flowers, and that night I suffered from severe pain in the stomach. I told the men with whom I was staying that I had unbearable stomach cramps. They told me that they always warn the tourists not to smell the flowers and asked if I had smelled them. My cramps were the result. That incident has left a permanent reminder in my brain. Even now if people bring me flowers, I just keep them in the corner. You never see me admiring them; I am very wary. I know their beauty, but at the same time I know their pain.

Therefore, allergy need not be confined only to the nose. It can be associated with any sense perception, and it can cause a reaction in any part of the body as well. There is a good medical treatment for nasal allergies. Place a few eucalyptus leaves in boiling water and inhale the fragrance. Alternatively, plant a few eucalyptus trees in your courtyard or near your house.

I suffer from very bad diarrhoea. What can I do to correct it?

First of all, how is your diet? When you suffer from diarrhoea it means your digestive system is not functioning. Digestion can cease for several reasons. It can occur if there is too much heat in the body. Then you should eat a cooling meal only once a day. You will have to get proper guidance from one of your local swamis as to what is a healthy diet for you in this season. If you suffer from chronic or long-term diarrhoea,

you will have to give up raw foods, such as salads. That is the first thing.

Diarrhoea can also be due to a structural disability of the intestines, but this is rare. You should be diagnosed by a doctor so the actual cause can be determined. However, unless there is also a fever or other signs of a specific infection, it is best to avoid drug therapy. By suppressing diarrhoea with drugs you are preventing a natural release and elimination. The result is that a more deep-seated health problem commonly arises. Most cases of simple diarrhoea are controlled by dietary correction together with yogic techniques.

Is there a method of treating headaches with yoga?

Headache is not a particular disease but a symptom. It could be a symptom of migraine or it can be due to high or low blood pressure, or to a defect of the eyes. Generally speaking, the practice of neti, tepid saline water passed through the nasal passages, will certainly help.

In cases of migraine are there any other practices?

As soon as you get up in the morning, drink two or three glasses of warm salty water and vomit it out. Do this each morning for a few weeks, then practise it every third day. Secondly, practise neti, and follow it with bhastrika pranayama. Thirdly, the whole digestive system should be cleansed by the practice of shankhaprakshalana.

Can yoga help epileptics?

Epilepsy is a symptom of an imbalance of nervous energy in specific centres within the brain. According to yogic science, epilepsy is most often due to depression of the central nervous system. Loneliness is one of the causes of epilepsy. Another cause is unfulfilled sexual desires, because sexual expression is one of the ways to dispose of toxins in the body. When a boy or girl enters puberty and develops secondary sexual characteristics, then their pituitary and reproductive glands have begun to secrete the various reproductive

hormones. Unless these products are shed from the body they will create mental and physical havoc. This is why so many boys and girls go crazy when denied sexual life. Both disorganized sexual life and total abstention from sexual life can cause epilepsy.

The depression which takes place in the nervous system can be corrected through pranayama. In addition, two further adjuncts are useful in helping epileptics. Firstly, fasting and secondly, medical dosage of marijuana. I'm talking about a medical dose, not a smoking dose! After all, the reason why sannyasins in India sometimes use marijuana is because they are not married. Because of abstention toxins are created in the body.

Chemists have extracted some important derivatives from the marijuana plant and used them successfully with epileptic patients. Following on from this, I believe that one of the most important cures for both depression and epilepsy is sexual interaction. I have had dealings with hundreds of epileptic patients and all were virgins. After marriage their condition corrected itself and they were alright. So we have to conduct our life correctly. That is yoga.

My husband suffers from Parkinson's disease. Is there any advice or yoga practice which will be useful for him?

Well, speaking from a physiological viewpoint, Parkinson's disease is due to a deficiency of one of the brain transmitter hormones, dopamine, in the centres of the brain which are responsible for muscular coordination and fine movements. It is a degenerative disease which afflicts some people late in life. In medical science, doctors administer the synthetic analogue of dopamine, known as L-dopa, in an effort to bolster the brain's diminishing level of dopamine, and this controls the symptoms of the disorder to a varying degree.

However, in yoga our approach is somewhat different. We aim to reactivate the degenerating areas of the brain by systematically stabilizing the nervous system using pranayama. The process of anarchical degeneration of the

brain centres has to be arrested and finally reversed. It is the same approach as we adopt in multiple sclerosis, where the protective, nourishing sheath of myelin surrounding some of the nervous conducting fibres and pathways in the brain begins to degenerate in a haphazard way. Those nerves are starved of nourishment, their prana shakti dwindles and they cease to function. Nevertheless the process is reversible. The difference is that multiple sclerosis occurs in a younger person, so reversal is easier to attain because motivation, commitment, self-effort and the will to change are attributes which are harder to awaken and sustain in an older person.

The best practice for people with Parkinson's disease is nadi shodhana pranayama, alternate nostril breathing. In this method there are two stages of retention: first with the breath held in, and then with the breath held out. When holding the breath in, practise jalandhara bandha, the throat lock, and moola bandha in which you contract the perineum. Hold these two locks while retaining the breath. Now, after breathing out, hold the breath outside and practise uddiyana bandha, contraction of the abdomen, along with jalandhara and moola bandhas. So, with internal retention there are two contractions, and in external retention there are three contractions.

When inhaling and exhaling, the ratio should be 1:2. In the beginning this ratio may prove impossible, but ultimately one should aim towards it. Don't practise 1:3 or 1:4, but 1:2. This is the fundamental physiological breath ratio for healing purposes where there is an energy deficit to be restored. At first the breath may be shaky and gross. It may be too quick or too slow. But, with daily practise, the flow of breath should be trained or cultivated until gradually the volume, intensity and quality of the breath passing in and out should be the same.

This is the detailed practice for a person suffering from Parkinson's disease. It should be performed daily, gradually increasing the number of rounds. The benefits will begin

to show themselves after a short time. There are also other practices, but this is sufficient for the time being. It can be practised in conjunction with other medical management if you desire.

Because of the severity of my husband's disorder, I cannot really know how much penetrates his consciousness, or how well he is able to understand or absorb my instructions.

Well, if he is not able to absorb this type of instruction, then start from a more preliminary process. Just let him sit still, breathe in and out, in and out. In this way, train him first in simply breathing with awareness. Once this is accomplished, he can close the right nostril and breathe in left, out left, in left, out left; then in right, out right, in right, out right; then in left, out right, in right, out left. Like this you go step by step, making sure he understands and responds.

Please explain hypertension and its control by yogic techniques.

Hypertension and hypotension are conditions which result from the two extreme states of mind being reflected in the brain and the nervous system. When the environmental and psychic tensions grow beyond a point of tolerance they produce hypertension, and when tension regresses or is suppressed down beyond the point of acceptance, that is hypotension.

A hypertensive state can be reflected in many parts of the body. Classically, the blood pressure rises, but a peptic ulcer can also develop, or many other manifestations can occur. If this state of excess strain is maintained for some time, the nervous system ultimately cannot withstand the strain and it may collapse. This is especially so when the tensions of the mind are not translated into the body. This is called nervous breakdown or depression. The person cannot withstand the mental tensions and he goes crazy. In some people the collapse occurs in the body, not the mind, and the blood pressure can fall, creating many other problems.

Hypotension and hypertension should be understood in relation to each other. In any case, there are yoga practices for each condition. The practice of pranayama is used extensively and there are also a few practices in kriya yoga that are helpful. These must be learned from a competent teacher.

What is the best yogic practice for hypertension?

There is one easy practice. You simply lie down or sit in a comfortable chair, close your eyes and become aware of your breath. Just follow the natural breath as it flows in and out, that's all. There should be a link between the mind and the body. This is the principle for reduction of hypertension. We all know that we breathe in and out, but we are not fully aware of it at any time. When you become conscious of it, you are creating this link between the mind and body, and the tensions are reduced. This reduction is real and it can be seen by taking blood pressure measurements before and after the practice. There is always a marked difference between the two readings.

Which asanas should I practise to increase my blood pressure?

Whether you have high or low blood pressure, if you practise siddhasana or siddha yoni asana, you can successfully regulate your blood pressure. To increase the blood pressure you should also practise shashankasana and sirshasana as well as bhastrika pranayama and kapalbhati pranayama followed by an extended relaxation.

What yogic practices do you suggest in the case of an irregular heartbeat?

Pawanmuktasana can always be done, but it is better that a person suffering from any form of heart disease be referred to an expert in yoga therapy who knows which exercises and treatment should be undertaken. For example, in many cases yoga nidra works very well but in other cases better results are obtained by giving the patient ajapa japa.

I suffer from ulcerative colitis, inflammation of the large intestine. Can my problem in the colon be an illness of the mind?

It's not only your disease which is in the mind. I think everybody is sick in the mind, not in the body. Happiness, sadness and constipation are mental. I think even death is mental. Mind plays a very important part in life, but what can we do about it, because we cannot really grasp the mind? It is just a little bit beyond our reach and we don't know how to hold it. We do not know what the mind is; we are so ignorant about it. We think that anger, passion or thought is the mind, but mind is a force, just as electricity is a force which can be seen in light or in the working of an air conditioner. In the same way, mind is a force which can be seen working in anger, passion or thought.

To grasp the mind one has to practise concentration. When you do this, you have visions and psychic experiences. These psychic experiences are the symbolic reflections of your childhood. In fact, our diseases, behaviour and thinking patterns are all a consequence of our childhood. If you go back beyond that, then it is the impression from the mother's womb before you were born.

When father's sperm and mother's ovum unite in the womb, genetic information is transmitted as DNA molecules are passed, and so the seeds of your father's or grandfather's or grandmother's sickness are passed on to you many generations later. Nor are you born for the first time now. The consciousness incarnates again and again. It is always evolving, changing from house to house, so therefore the roots of disease are often very deep. But concentration can definitely help you to know, understand and transcend disease.

It is best to start with yogasanas and hatha yoga cleansing techniques. Then commence pranayama and slowly begin to practise concentration. You'll get better.

Can yoga cure cancer?

I firmly believe that yoga can cure cancer, but the experimental work is still being done. So far as medical therapy

goes, meditation, pranayama, as well as a few yogasanas can definitely help a patient suffering from cancer.

A pupil of mine has skin cancer and I have advised her to practise yogic shatkarmas and to become vegetarian. Do you have any additional suggestions?

So many people sunbathe to excess and this is what happens. There should be some limitation. After all, white people are beautiful and black people are also beautiful. Beauty is not a quality of colour.

Along with the other suggestions, your student should not expose her body to the hot sun until she is completely well and she should begin to practise amaroli. This involves the internal use and external application of one's urine. A lot of scientific investigations have already been made on the chemical composition of urine and this information has all been compiled in a Bihar School of Yoga publication called *Amaroli*. Studies reveal that there are many different chemicals, hormones and enzymes in our urine and that these can have a beneficial effect in terms of helping to overcome disease.

Amaroli can be safely used in mild forms of cancer. I have not come to any conclusions about its use in the more fatal forms of cancer, but I have seen it work. In skin cancer, this practice can be beneficial.

Can yoga nidra improve the eyesight?

Yoga nidra can prove effective in visual disorders if it is suitably adapted. Dr Bates' system of regenerating the eyes is very famous. Many sufferers have thrown away their glasses and have not looked back even after twenty years. If you look at this system, you will see that it is clearly based on the principles of yoga nidra.

As you know, the structural apparatus allowing the eyes to accommodate to light and dark and for far and near vision is directly influenced by both the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems working in collaboration. Many visual disorders arise when that collaboration is defunct or haywire.

Yoga nidra effectively restores harmony and strength to the nervous system.

Generally, however, for weakness or loss of eyesight, we need to use another system which is parallel to yoga nidra. It is called prana vidya. In this practice extra life force is concentrated in the affected areas of the body. Prana vidya develops the same state of relaxed awareness as yoga nidra. In that state the *prana* or life force is experienced and can be directed for self-healing.

Myopia, for example, is readily cured by relieving spasm in the muscle controlling the lens of the eye. Once the eyes are relaxed, prana vidya can be used to restore lost visual capacity.

Another distinct and most effective practice for visual weakness is trataka. Gazing unflinchingly at a candle flame and holding it clearly in focus reawakens lost visual powers. However, the flame need not be an external one. You can practise trataka in yoga nidra as well.

If this is so, would yoga nidra be a great help in the treatment of squint (strabismus) in children?

Yes, in squint, yoga nidra can be adopted and it will surely help. Squint is a defect in position and muscular coordination of the two eyeballs in relation to each other. Also, cases of glaucoma, excess fluid locked within the eye chamber, can definitely be improved through this practice.

Has yoga nidra already been tried in cases of hemiplegia (paralysis due to cerebral thrombosis)?

Not yoga nidra but prana vidya has been tried and it has worked very rapidly and successfully.

Could you give some advice on infertility in females and suggest some yoga practices that will help?

Sometimes female infertility is due to a major structural abnormality present since birth. In such congenital deficiencies, little can be done yogically, and rarely some surgical

correction can be made. However, the most common cause of female infertility is amenorrhea or failure to menstruate due to disturbance or imbalance of the endocrine glands. More specifically, there is a problem in the hormonal axis between the pituitary body in the brain and the ovaries in the pelvis, which are responsible for producing the female sex hormones, oestrogen and progesterone. As a result, the menstrual cycle is absent, either since birth or the last pregnancy, or since some period of psychic anxiety or great emotional stress.

These forms of infertility respond well to a program of yogasanas, bandhas and kriyas designed specifically to activate and awaken dormant energy in the pelvic and reproductive organs. Dhanurasana (bow pose), sarvangasana (shoulder stand pose) and matsyasana (fish pose), which is the counterpose of sarvangasana, should be practised daily. These should be followed by uddiyana bandha (abdominal contraction).

If practised regularly for a few months, these four asanas should be sufficient to correct this condition completely. Sometimes, if the body is sick or imbalanced in some other way as well, it is possible that instead of restoring fertility, some other trouble is created. Thyroid imbalance can lead to amenorrhea, but this is corrected when the thyroid is balanced through yogic asanas. It is a matter of assessing the type of endocrine imbalance from the body type, weight and structure.

Do birth control pills cause hormonal imbalance in the body? Is chemical birth control an undesirable thing?

Yes, it is. The yoga practitioner should not take birth control pills. I am not against birth control because it is people's desire. Let people do what they like, it is not my business. But there is an important hormone group in the human body known as prostaglandins. These hormones will counteract the process of conception and implantation of the zygote in the uterus. The levels of prostaglandin in the female body can be enhanced through yogic methods to the point that they provide a safe and effective natural form of birth control.

Your own hormones will then naturally counteract the process of conception. This is a natural development in women who continue to practise yoga. They also acquire the ability to prime themselves to conceive wilfully, when pregnancy is desired.

As you evolve in yoga, you gain control over many natural processes. But to follow this process of natural birth control, you must rely on your own hormones rather than introducing synthetic ones from outside.

Is it true that as a woman advances on the spiritual path her menstruation stops? And is she still able to have children?

It is not necessary that the monthly cycle stops as you make spiritual progress. Sometimes it happens that women stop menstruating after a thorough internal cleansing is undertaken using the practices of hatha yoga, but it is not a very common feature.

The monthly cycle reflects a woman's emotional metabolism. Spiritual advancement cannot be equated with its appearance or disappearance. Many women continue to have a monthly period in spite of very high spiritual attainments, while in others the monthly flow is undoubtedly reduced to a minimum. Similarly, there are many women, who do not practise yoga or other forms of spiritual life and possess no spiritual aspiration, who do not have a monthly cycle. When that is the case, a gynaecologist can usually restore menstruation by administering hormones.

However, if menstruation ceases in a yogini, she knows why it has ceased and she also knows how to reactivate the cycle. It is a by-product of the inner spiritual life. As such she is always capable of bearing children if she wishes and she is also capable of avoiding undesired pregnancy.

So please do not equate the appearance or disappearance of your monthly cycle with your spiritual progress, because spiritual advancement, realization and unfoldment take place very far from the body.

Sometimes I feel a jerk in manipura. It often happens when I am surprised or afraid. What can it be?

When one is frightened or anxious, one has the feeling of some kind of cramp, shock or a jerk in the navel region. This is due to the nature of the stress mechanism in your system which prepares you instantly for a fight-or-flight reaction. It occurs on account of the sudden injection of adrenal secretions into your bloodstream. You have to overcome this by doing pranayama. If you practise pranayama coupled with moola bandha, in time the fear or anxiety will go away.

Loud sounds and sometimes even subtle sounds upset me very much, making my life impossible. Also when I am filing in the office my eyes are affected in a peculiar way. What is causing these problems?

Whatever the precise problem is, it is certainly something to do with your nervous system. It may also have some psychological basis in your early childhood. I believe that the best thing for you to do is to follow an asana and pranayama program daily for a considerably long time. This will vastly strengthen your nervous system and you will be able to regain tolerance for sounds. You have to proceed with the physical side of yoga first. Later you can add some other practices of concentration. You must practise asanas, pranayama and yoga nidra in the beginning. Start with a program of fifteen minutes of asanas, five minutes of pranayama and twenty minutes of yoga nidra.

I know a lady who has been practising yoga for several years. She does asanas, pranayama and meditation, eats correctly and lives in a good environment. Two years ago, doctors discovered that she had breast cancer and she underwent an operation. However, the cancer continued to grow and spread to other parts of her body. Her ovaries and adrenals have since been removed and now she receives heavy chemical treatment. She is very weak and thin and has lost her hair. Could she have prevented this?

This lady might have been practising yoga for a few years, but from all the scientific conclusions the cancerous growth must have already developed. By the time she started involving herself in the practices of yoga, the cancer's growth must have already crossed the boundary line. And when cancer crosses a particular border line in its development, it becomes incurable.

There is an Australian doctor who is an expert in cancer therapy. Along with other scientific methods of treatment he has been teaching his patients pranayama and meditation. He and many other scientists today feel that one of the major causes of cancer is drugs. The chemical properties of different drugs are unpredictable and they remain in the body tissues for months or years after administration.

Modern drugs are synthetic chemicals which are manufactured on a commercial scale. They are tested in many ways, and those which give good and positive results are placed on the market. However, their far reaching effects are not known to scientists. That is why the thalidomide tragedy occurred and it could also be the cause of the modern day 'cancer tragedy'. In the case of this particular lady, a synthetic chemical or hormone could have caused this rapid cancer growth.

Besides the modern drugs, there is another dangerous health hazard which has arisen in this century, closely paralleling the increasing cancer rate. That is chemically grown food. Today, so many types of chemicals, nitrosulphate, nitrophosphate and many others are used, and who knows how these chemicals are affecting us? In order to grow and sell more food and make greater profits, chemical manufacturers have been unwisely and unscrupulously marketing these chemical fertilizers. Maybe everybody does not take medicine, but everybody takes food. And we are all the innocent victims.

Food preservatives are another carcinogenic factor. These preservatives have been shown to cause cancer, tumours and fibrositis in experimental animals. They bring down the body temperature and only then does cancer and tumour take place. Cancer and tumour belong to the cold diseases which

thrive and develop when the body temperature is considerably lowered. There are also other things that contribute to cancer development. For example, on modern poultry farms the hens are injected with hormones to increase their yield. Then people eat the chickens and the hormones are transferred to their bodies. These hormones are injected into the hens so they will give more eggs. When they are transferred to us, we produce eggs. Yes, tumour is the egg.

These are but a few of the factors which induce cancer in man. According to studies made by cancer experts, the initial growth of cancer is very surreptitious and very secret. It is such an unseen and unknown process that even the most sophisticated instruments cannot detect it. Scientists have even analyzed the DNA molecules, but have not succeeded in detecting the cancer. Only when the process is absolutely organized and established in the body and when the body has completely become a victim of cancer is science able to clearly diagnose that one has cancer.



5

Mental Health

What is peace of mind?

Peace of mind is a balanced vision of life. It is not subject to achievements and losses; it is an understanding of everything in life. The external life is full of ups and downs and for a weak man it can become tiring, or even exhausting. But for a strong man, every ascent is a joy and every descent is a game.

How can I have a free mind?

It is very difficult to have a free mind, and more than that, it is very dangerous. If a tiger is not kept caged, it might run free and kill many people. Before you think about making the mind free, it must be educated, trained and disciplined, otherwise it might bring destruction to you and to others.

The mind is very powerful. It is the basis of good and evil and it can manifest anxiety or balance. The same mind wants to commit suicide at one instant and to realize God the next. This means there are two stages of mind: the untamed mind and the trained mind. A yogi has a trained mind, but an animal doesn't. Now, in man there is an animal, a man and a god. Once a man has trained his thoughts and emotions, his actions are controlled, and then he can think of making his mind free.

If you do not discipline yourself before making the mind free, it will make you unhappy and depressed. It will create hatred, likes and dislikes, attachments and repulsions, and it

could influence you towards self-destruction. Nowadays we are all suffering because our minds are undisciplined. So when we talk about freedom of mind, we should not forget about discipline. Discipline of mind and freedom of mind should go together; they are not independent of each other.

What are the spiritual methods for relieving tensions of the mind?

If the tension is too acute, one should leave home for some time and stay in a peaceful environment such as that of an ashram. This is the first step. The second is satsang. When something is wrong with your car, you take it to a garage and leave it with a good mechanic for a few days. He will find out what is wrong with the car and clean and service it. Likewise, when there is a lot of tension in your mind, the best thing to do is to put your car into the hands of a good mechanic. Satsang is the best way. If the tension is not acute, then a few asanas, pranayama and the practice of yoga nidra can be undertaken.

Tensions are three-fold: muscular, mental and emotional. If muscular tension is due to over-exercise, you need to rest a little more. If it is due to lack of exercise, then you have to make yourself more active. If your tension is mental, due to a lot of thinking and daydreaming, then you should work hard through karma yoga to give direction to your mind. Mental tensions arise when you have too much time to think. Emotional tensions due to love, hatred, death, etc., are more difficult to eliminate and have to be handled with accurate precision through bhakti yoga. For the relief of these three-fold tensions one has to follow the spiritual path.

What is the way to stop thoughts from going deeply into the mind?

When a thought comes to your mind, your approach to it is of the utmost importance. Suppose, for example, you either like or dislike the thought of having diarrhoea, that thought will always re-enter your mind. It has the potential to go deeply into your mind. However, if you see the thought but refuse to

have any relationship or association with the idea, i.e. if you are completely neutral towards it, then it will quickly cease. When you just remain a witness, a seer of an experience, it ceases, but when you become involved with a thought, or emotionally affected by it, either positively or negatively, then it goes back into the mind to be recycled.

What is the difference between suppression and control by the will?

Suppression is a kind of opposition to your personality, where you really do not agree with yourself, but in control there is mutual agreement between both the elements of the mind. When I want to control myself, I agree with myself totally. In suppression, however, I don't want to do something but I still do it. That is the fundamental difference.

What is mania?

Mania is when the same thing recurs in the mind again and again. There are many types of maniacs, money maniacs, sex maniacs, power maniacs. Oh, there is a big list of maniacs. And it's difficult to get out of a mania as it has such a great gravitational pull. If you can't get out of the centre of gravity, then you get into neurosis. Then comes anxiety, followed by the experience of moroseness. And then you begin to really suffer; you develop pain in the mind and everywhere in the body.

So, what to do? You have to replace the centre of mania so that its other forms will be polarized. You create a new direction for your mind and try to fulfil that. If a thorn has lodged itself in your foot, what do you do? You remove it with another thorn. In the same way, you remove a mania with another mania. Supposing you develop yoga mania, all other manias will be diverted properly, because yoga mania is very powerful and involving. If you just develop yoga mania for a few months, everything will balance itself.

You will also have to work very hard physically to help overcome some of the strong onslaughts of mania. This will

be difficult at first and you will have to push yourself into it, but once you conquer the initial laziness and lethargy, you will find physical work a joy.

How can we eliminate negative vrittis from the mind?

Vrittis should neither be thought of as positive nor negative. I will explain why with an example. If your stomach is bad or constipated and you drink some strong tea or coffee, you might suddenly get diarrhoea. Is this positive or negative? It may be uncomfortable having to go to the toilet several times, but if your digestion has been bad for the last few days, the diarrhoea is a positive thing because it brought you relief. In the same way, fear, anger and passion are like mental diseases and if you don't express them, you will go mad. Too much happiness, too much sorrow, agony or anxiety, if not released, will drive the mind crazy.

According to yoga, the vrittis are five-fold and each vritti can be either *klishta* or *aklishta*. *Klishta* means painful or difficult and *aklishta* means painless or pleasant. When you hate someone, it is *klishta* vritti and when you love someone, it is *aklishta* vritti. Every field of awareness, every kind of thought or knowledge is classified as a vritti and as *klishta* or *aklishta*.

One vritti is the state of sleep, *nidra*. This is a suspended state in which you don't know anything, no pain or pleasure, you don't remember yesterday and you don't think about tomorrow. The second vritti is called memory or *smriti*, where you remember the good and bad things of your past. The third is unfounded belief, *vikalpa*, when you imagine something. It is a creation of the mind, there is no basis for it, or the basis is in fact non-existent. You may think that someone is plotting to kill you or that I am going to leave everything to you when I die. The fourth is misconception or *viparyaya*, when the basis is there but you mistake it for something else. When you see a cow at night and think it is a tiger, or when someone loves you but you think he hates you, this is *viparyaya*. The fifth one is right knowledge, or *pramana*, gained from the sense

organs. When you see an object or hear a sound as it really is, this is pramana.

These are the five vrittis of the mind. They can be either *klishta* or *aklishta*, but they cannot be classified as positive or negative.

How are we influenced by living in ordinary society? Does the constant suggestion we are subjected to from advertising, newspapers, etc., affect our minds?

Everybody is under hypnosis. Constant influence is being exerted on all individuals and it is totally structuring their minds. The whole lifestyle is a hypnotic process. Delusion hypnotizes you and you are continually exposed to newspapers, advertisements, television, radio, books and magazines which keep you under hypnosis.

How are you going to dehypnotize yourself? If you manage it, you will be disillusioned about the whole scheme of society. We live within a family pattern, a man and woman live together and call themselves husband and wife. That's hypnotism. If you were to dehypnotize yourself, the family would break up. In fact, man lives under constant hypnotism right from the time of his birth up to the point of his death. Perhaps only a few people are not under that hypnotic state.

Once I tried to dehypnotize myself, and I found that I had no faith in anything. I was full of doubt and I couldn't be sure of the honesty and sincerity of anyone. Therefore, it is easier for most people to remain hypnotized. But as you grow in spiritual life, you automatically become dehypnotized.

Where does restlessness come from and how can it be overcome?

Generally, restlessness is due to excessive thinking and desiring, and it indicates that the mind is not under your control. In this physical body there are two forms of energy. One is known as mental energy and the other is vital or *pranic* energy. When you are feeling restless, it means your mental energy is

high and your pranic energy is low. There is an imbalance; your sense organs are very active and your motor organs are less active. In hatha yoga language, we call this an imbalance between ida and pingala nadis, or in modern scientific terms, an imbalance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.

In order to harmonize the excess mental energy it is necessary for one to practise more raja yoga concentration. The best method is repetition of a mantra. The mantra can be repeated mentally, either with or without the use of a mala. It can also be practised in synchronization with the breath. Of course there are many other ways of practising the mantra, but these are the best methods for checking the outflow of mental energy.

If you are not able to do this, then there is another way of approaching the problem. You should try to increase the level of prana in the body. Either you check the quantum of mental energy or you increase the quantum of pranic energy. The purpose of hatha yoga, raja yoga, or in fact any form of yoga is to create this harmonious situation.

At the same time, on another level, there are certain hormonal secretions in the physical body which contribute to restlessness. The most disturbing hormones are adrenaline and testosterone. If you can efficiently control the outflow of these hormones, you can overcome the primary physiological factors leading to restlessness.

By regularly practising asanas, pranayama and meditation, hormonal production is controlled, the mental and pranic energies are harmonized and problems such as restlessness do not occur.

What can I do about restlessness at work?

You obviously don't like your work. If you want to enjoy it, you will have to make work a part of your sadhana. Instead of thinking that your work is just a means of earning money, think of it as sadhana. When you are working, concentrate on what you are doing, but when there is a little pause in the

work, start repeating your mantra. You should also practise more pranayama in the morning, particularly *kumbhaka*, breath retention.

How can I stop my mind from criticizing other people?

There is no harm in criticizing other people in your mind. If you stop this mental process, then you will criticize others openly and will harm them. I think criticism is part of evolution. You have to accept it and face it, no matter how bitter it may be. If you don't want to criticize, then you are going to be criticized. Then what will happen? You will be wounded. You are going to get a shock, because you are an idealist and you have failed to accept realism.

So when these kinds of negative thoughts come into your mind, you must understand them, not from the religious point of view, but as laws of nature. Nature has certain laws and negativity is one of them. If there is no negativity, there can't be progress in life. We hear people say, "This is negative", or "Oh, my mind thinks negatively!" What do they mean by it? If there is dark, there should be light. Day and night balance each other. Positive and negative forces indicate the constant evolutionary process of the mind. If a baby tries to walk and falters and falls, it means he is evolving. If he doesn't make a move, it means he is paralyzed.

During life there are many times when you are negative and then you become positive again. Just like the cycle of day and night, the attitude of your mind changes from time to time. When evil thoughts come into the mind, religious people shudder. We are kept from the reality of nature by religion. We ought to be told that evil thoughts are as much a part of the human mind as good thoughts. Evolution is a constant movement like a pendulum; forward, backward, forward, backward. The evolution of life that you have reached in your human incarnation has never moved in one straight line. It has moved back and forth, back and forth. This is how the energy moves. When these thoughts of criticism come into your mind, let them come. You should have an attitude

of understanding toward them, they are your offspring. A thought of criticism has not been imported from outside; it is your own creation.

If you disagree with one of the attitudes of your mind, you are creating friction between one part of yourself and another, between one attitude and another. This is what leads people to schizophrenia. All schizophrenics are those who have been unable to maintain amicable relations with themselves. It is most important that you have a friendly relationship with every dimension of thought that comes into your mind. After all, what is a thought? It is not an emotion; it is a bubble of energy, this way or that way, it is a negative and a positive energy. Don't worry about the thoughts of criticism. Sit down quietly and go on criticizing as much as you like.

In the course of life should one act or let things happen?

You have to let things happen, but at the same time you have to try to make some effort. One should not lose hope and courage. One should try to act in the best possible manner and contribute to success. It is always good to fight with the circumstances and events of life, but one must know that in order to fight well in life, it is best to maintain a balanced attitude rather than become excited, neurotic or unnecessarily stimulated.

If you want to build a house, a factory, a shop or a family, you have to make positive efforts to accomplish this, but sometimes it happens that things don't work out. This acts negatively on the human mind. One is affected very much at that juncture with psychological, mental and physical problems. At this time, you must let things happen. Letting things happen is a very good philosophy, but it should be practised only when things have gone beyond your hands. As long as the situation is under your control, try to work it out as smoothly and as intelligently as you can.

When husband and wife live together, they should try to be as happy as possible. If there are occasional troubles between them, they should try to resolve them. If a great split

is going to take place, still they should try to avoid it. And if they do separate, they should think about making amends and renewing the relationship. But if the relationship is completely finished, they must simply accept it. This is the best way to avoid psychological, mental and physical problems. Although this is just one example, it applies to all situations in life.

What is the best way to overcome complexes?

Ashram life and karma yoga are the best therapy for people with many mental problems. In my ashram I tell people to work so hard that they have no time to think or to be unhappy. Complexes disappear miraculously when the mind has no time to dwell on them.

My only son has schizophrenia. Why can he not be cured?

Schizophrenia is a state of mind and it can be cured. In fact, most people are schizophrenic, but because they are able to maintain some degree of control, they haven't reached that point where their mental condition can be termed as a disease. When a person loses control and is unable to command his mental situations and manifestations, then it is termed as a disease.

In order to lead a schizophrenic back to normal behaviour, he has to be exposed to the practices of yoga. First he must practise the hatha yoga techniques to purify the glands and nervous system, and then raja and jnana yoga. After this he can be made interested in karma yoga and his progress will be rapid, because karma yoga is the most powerful method.

In our Munger ashram we have successfully treated a number of schizophrenics, but there is often a problem. Although yogic therapy is very powerful and effective, it does not always complete the cure because the people return to the same situation where they became schizophrenic. They go back to the same family, the same work, the same habits, food and environment, and our work is undone. That is the

reason why we are not able to give the full cure which is possible through yoga practices.

The swamis in our Scandinavian ashrams used to go to the mental hospitals in Denmark and Sweden and teach the patients the cleansing practices of hatha yoga and other techniques. Several patients were cured and discharged from the hospital, but we were concerned about their rehabilitation because we knew their social environment would only make them crazy again. So we created an establishment where they could stay and work with the ashram, teaching yoga and writing and printing books. If a patient is observed carefully, and his diet and daily activities are regulated, then yoga can definitely help him.

How can I become humble?

From time to time, forget your power and position and put aside your social, financial, intellectual or spiritual values. Go to ashrams, places of pilgrimage, shrines, etc., and change the pattern of your life completely. Remove all the prefixes and suffixes from your name, you know God didn't put them there. Just be as you are, a simple person. If you do this, in the course of time you will become humble. There are many acts of humility and if you can practise even the easiest of them, humility will gradually become part of your nature.

I am disturbed by so many distractions. How can I get rid of them?

Distractions are natural for everybody. Even if you live in seclusion at the top of the mountains, you will have distractions. If you close yourself off in a soundproof chamber, you will still have distractions. Distractions are born of desires, ignorance and unawareness of the spirit. When you are not following the inner path side by side with external life, you will have more distractions, whether you are living in the country or in a busy city. On the yogic path you can learn to live to the fullest without being affected by distractions.

Old people usually get caught up on the same pattern of thought and keep repeating the same problems again and again. Can you suggest any practices that will help them?

Elderly people usually have enormous awareness but they are without a centre where everything can be aligned and streamlined together. The practice of mantra and a few hatha yoga exercises should be given to them. Combine these two and after about six months yoga nidra can be added.

Another form of yoga that is important for elderly people is kundalini yoga. They should practise sending their awareness up and down the spine from mooladhara chakra at the base to ajna at the top. A constant stream of consciousness must be maintained. This can be practised while lying on the back or while sitting in a chair. Gradually, this practice will awaken the responses in the channels that flow within the framework of the spine and connect these two important chakras.

I detest money and I know it doesn't bring happiness but still I can't stop spending it. What should I do?

Utilize your passion for money to accomplish good work. Do not squander your wealth away in pubs and clubs. Utilize it with restraint and wisdom. Don't be swayed by the whimsical promptings of your mind. Keep some money for your family and for your day-to-day existence, then set apart the rest and use it in the best way you can think of to help in the awakening of humanity.

How can we develop willpower?

Concentration, positive thinking, regular life and clarity of purpose will develop willpower.

What is the difference between self-confidence and ego?

Well, everybody can understand the difference between self-confidence and ego. Self-confidence comes by means of experience and proper training, but egoism is one's gross nature. It has nothing to do with experience and nothing to do with training or guidance.

Since I have been practising karma yoga it seems that my pride and ego have become even greater. How can I eradicate them?

During the practice of karma yoga many symptoms manifest. There is vanity, egoism, mean-mindedness and a lot of pride. At some stage you will probably think, "I am a karma yogi and all these other people are wretched." You will also have to face a lot of mental dissipations, oscillations and distractions on the path of karma yoga. One has to know them. They should be analyzed and not opposed, then they will go away in the course of time.

The practice of karma yoga is a gradual process of self-purification. Selflessness does not come all of a sudden; it is the culmination of the total process of karma yoga. The obstacles you confront in the beginning are inevitable, but if you continue practising karma yoga with the attitude of a detached witness, the ego will definitely fade away.

What can yoga do for mentally retarded children?

Some work has been done on the effects of yoga on mentally retarded people, especially children, and it has been found that if the child is properly guided through the practice of important asanas, a great deal of change can be brought about. The asanas particularly recommended are those which have a direct effect on the hormonal secretions of the pituitary body and so on. These include sarvangasana and sirshasana. After these asanas have been practised for some time, pranayama and bandhas should be slowly introduced. These techniques will definitely make an improvement, but I think there is still a lot of work to be done. Parents tend to be very careless about their mentally retarded children and they are not obtaining the desired results from the systems they expose their children to. If you send the child to a school, some of his faculties may be developed, but what about the fundamental structure of the brain?

Sometimes a mentally retarded child has perfect brain structure, but there is some psycho-emotional block which

has been created by the parents or by his environment. When this is the case, the practice of yoga nidra is beneficial. The child might not understand the practice, but that is not important. If the teacher utilizes the right form of yoga nidra, he can get into the child's deeper mind and influence his whole personality. Thereby, he may be able to bring him out of the psycho-emotional confusion.

For the best results with yogic therapy it is essential that we have a clear-cut diagnosis of the child's retardation so we can determine the category to which he belongs and the correct method of treatment.

What is the place in the universe for people with an unbalanced mind? And what is the purpose of their existence?

Those who are crazy are the people that have completely rejected the whole scheme of your society. They are the people who have been searching for the truth. Because they did not find it in your society, they lost every hope. They could not find what they were aspiring for in the environment society offered so they went what you call crazy. But in the next life they will become swamis like myself.



6

Emotional Health

What is the secret of happiness?

The secret of happiness lies in connecting the mind with its source. Once you are able to do this, happiness flows. When you know the source, you become an elevated person in thought as well as in action. Happiness is within your reach, and you can hold it firmly, but incessant and noble efforts are necessary.

What is the best way to deal with aggression in oneself?

Aggression can be combated by the practice of sheetalī and sheetkārī prāṇāyāmas, but I think you should first make a thorough study of your personality. Aggression is a part of your nature which has developed during the course of your life, and sometimes you can cause psychological disturbances if you try to arrest a natural aspect of your personality.

I feel that one should also apply one's nature in constructive and creative work. A man with an aggressive nature can be very dynamic. He can utilize his personality to bring about great changes in society.

I tend to respond emotionally to all the day-to-day situations. What can I do about this?

This must be quite disturbing for you. Emotions should be preserved, and they should be utilized for a higher flight into the realm of consciousness. In order to sublimate and channel the emotions, you must turn to the path of bhakti yoga.

Is it necessary to go through a state of suffering to reach the higher level of bliss and joy?

Suffering is a very relative term. Pain and happiness, joy and struggle are experiences of the mind. They are not actual happenings. Mind is subject to the laws of relativity and it makes its experiences look real. Therefore, if you try to improve the quality of your mind and experience, you can change your objective reactions.

When one experiences pain and suffering, it is mostly due to the suppression one is subjected to in one's personal and social life. People's reactions differ according to their mental states. For example, if you slap a child, he will scream helplessly. If you slap your wife, she will boil with anger. If you slap a crazy man, he will just look at you. The physiological reactions are the same, but the psychological reactions are different.

The same thing applies to love, hatred and other psychological and emotional factors. What happens when we have the experience of joy? We bubble over completely and express ourselves totally. When we are unhappy, we try to suppress our emotions and suffer alone. That is called depression. Throughout the ages, mankind has been subjected to suppressions, and as a result man's nature has become auto-suppressive. We are not aware of suppressing ourselves, but everything is automatically suppressed, and because of this we suffer. If, instead of trying to suppress our pain, we could accept it and experience it fully, it would go away.

In my opinion, one should try to improve the quality of one's mind and widen the vision of experience. Don't just look at your unhappiness and miseries from a subjective angle. Try to detach yourself and look at whatever is happening from outside. Misery is an idea. It is one kind of experience, but you can have different experiences from the same idea, from the same event.

Because your minds are conditioned, you only have one experience from life's events, but if you widen the vision of your mind, you will have a different experience from pain.

You can interchange the quality of experience also; from happiness you can get pain and from unhappiness you can feel pleasure. It is difficult at first, but you can do it if you train the mind. Then you will find that life is a continual process of joy. The so-called sorrow and suffering are relative concepts. If there is anything in life, it is joy, it is bliss. It is not suffering. Suffering belongs to the animal evolution and incarnation. If one has evolved in consciousness, one should not suffer and if one is suffering, then one is not in a spiritual state.

Is there any easy technique to practise which will ease the feeling of anger or jealousy?

Anger is one of the biggest barriers in life and jealousy is absolutely unnecessary and useless. When you are angry with somebody, at least it has some kind of advantage; the person with whom you are angry obeys or respects you, but jealousy has absolutely no reward at all. In my opinion you should never worry about jealousy or anger, but practise shashankasana and it will help. Sit in vajrasana, bend forward and touch your forehead to the floor. Bring your arms forward and rest them on the floor or clasp the hands together behind your back. Remain in this posture for two to thirty minutes. Shashankasana helps to control the adrenal glands and calms the mind.

How can I overcome the state of depression?

Practise asanas, pranayama and plenty of physical karma yoga. Then you will be alright.

When you feel annoyed with someone, is it better to express your feelings or try not to let them show?

It may be dangerous if I tell you the truth, but it is better to speak out. Supposing I have something against you in my mind, there are three possibilities: either I am wrong, I am right, or I am both. Now if I am right and I give vent to my mind, then I am clear, I can have a good sleep, a nice breakfast

in the morning and a smooth day at work. If I am wrong, and I give vent to my mind, I will still have a good night's sleep and wake up with a clear mind, but you will have problems. If I am both wrong and right, which is usually the case, then it does not matter.

I feel it is much better to express your annoyance and to fight these things out. If there is something in me which you don't like, you should tell me what it is. For fifteen minutes you attack me, and for fifteen minutes I will retaliate. There is no harm in this. I believe in it, but many people don't. They keep everything inside until one day they have a heart attack. If, for a few days, weeks or months, people expressed their negative feelings, they would overcome a lot of them and gain a deeper understanding of life.

Our society has been structured in such a way that we try to keep a very nice picture in the courtyard. We try to give our personality a pleasant appearance. If there are bad feelings between you and me, we always try to present ourselves in a very dignified way and cover the whole thing up. In the front yard everything is in order, but the back yard is very dirty. We can't let people see a dirty front yard or they will say, "You people are fighting too much, it's very bad."

During the course of life there will be a lot of misunderstandings and negative feelings will arise, but if you don't express them, you will become neurotic. It is much better for people to say what they think. Let them fight with each other, especially when they are young. If you let your children fight amongst themselves, by the time they are married, their personalities will have smoothed out and they will not have a great inclination to fight with their husbands and wives.

How can we discriminate between fear of change and wise caution?

It is very difficult to differentiate, but when the mind is in your control and you are able to look at things in a detached way, you can determine the difference.

Why do our emotions often bring us to tears? Is it good to cry?

There are certain laws of nature by which we are controlled. If someone dies in the family, everybody cries. If your friends come to see you at this time, you start crying. Why? It is not really because someone is dead that you cry, but because the death has caused certain constrictions in the system and by crying they are released.

Now, when you feel a lot of pain in the body you start crying and moaning. Why? Because when you moan, you are practising *rechaka*, exhalation of breath. When you practise *rechaka*, pain is removed from its centre in the brain. So if you feel like crying, you should not suppress your tears. Don't try to fight your natural reactions, nature has a very organized system and you should have faith in it.

Yoga practices and spiritual development have increased my already high level of sensitivity and I find it difficult to rise above the personality level. How can I retain my sensitivity and not feel things so personally?

While you are going through the experiences of yoga in your spiritual life, there are stages when you become very sensitive, but if you have a guru who can give you spiritual advice from time to time, and if you retire from your active life every now and then, you will be able to maintain a better balance between the two extremes.

Please discuss the different levels of fear and how to accept and overcome them.

There are various forms of fear and there are so many that at every step of our life we face them; fear of disease, insult, death, losing money, etc. Fear rules our lives. The best way to remove a fear is to trace it back to its origin. And every time you will find that the source of fear is ignorance.

When your consciousness is unable to penetrate deeper than the present state of mind, fear comes. A child has its own limitations of mind, and beyond them there is fear. If a

child goes to the bathroom at night, he is afraid because it is dark, but if I go to the bathroom, I'm not afraid because I know there is nothing there. If I ask you to sleep beside a dead man, you probably couldn't do it. Even if you were sure that the man was dead, you would still be filled with fear. But I could sleep there because I know that he is dead, his spirit has been withdrawn and nothing will happen to me.

So the main cause of fear is lack of knowledge. When one has knowledge combined with understanding, one becomes fearless.

What causes a person to have a fear of riding on buses, trains, planes, etc., and are there yogic techniques that will help overcome the problem?

Normally children do not have this type of fear. They are afraid of darkness and particular personalities, etc., but they are never afraid to travel in aeroplanes and buses, or even to go near a fire. This type of fear usually occurs in people over thirty-five years of age.

There are two basic reasons for such fears. One is an accumulation of fat in the nervous tissues and physical organs of the body, especially in this age group. In younger people the rate of metabolism is much faster and this prevents the body accumulating excess fat in any organ or part of the body. In order to reduce these fears one should make an effort to eliminate the accumulation of fat.

The second cause is due to a physiological process that occurs in the body as a response to a frightening or confusing situation. When fear is experienced in the brain, it is passed on to the body via the glandular and nervous systems which prepare the body for fight or flight.

Experiments conducted on thieves preparing to enter and steal from a house at night have shown that the flow of adrenal secretions is greatly increased. Their whole body is fighting their unconscious fear. As a result, at that time they may feel like going to the toilet, they may sweat profusely or experience heavy breathing.

There are two ways of overcoming the fear complex. In the first case one should try to metabolize the fat accumulation. In the second case one should practise antar mouna. Let the fear come and witness it, observing the effects it has on your mind, body and emotions. After some time you will realize the cause of your fear and find that it is rooted in a forgotten childhood experience.

If you practise shashankasana for half an hour daily, you will be able to control the secretion of adrenaline and the fright and fear will then gradually diminish. If you practise shashankasana, antar mouna and pranayama regularly, after some time you will relive the childhood experience in your mind and all fear will vanish like a miracle.

My brother is a spiritual person, but lately he has been running from one emotional relationship to another. Why is he doing this?

Every human being has emotional potential and varieties of emotions within him. At certain stages he is aware of brotherly, platonic, marital and paternal love and, for the fulfilment of these needs, different people come into his life, such as mother, father, brother, sister, friend, lover, wife, child. However, just having a child, a husband, a wife or a girlfriend does not fulfil the needs of the emotions. There comes a time in man's life when, despite all these relationships, he experiences a type of vacuum. This occurs when he has become aware of a higher and more refined state of emotional love called devotion. To fulfil himself, man needs two more relationships. One is the guru-disciple relationship and the other is the God-devotee relationship.

The relationship between guru and disciple and the relationship between God and devotee complete the whole structure of our emotional needs. If you are preparing vegetable curry and you have left out the two most important ingredients, it will not taste right. In the same way, we people of the world have been trying to live happily with many relationships, but have been missing the two main ones.

How can I reach a state of love for all things around me? Is this possible for an ordinary man to achieve?

Love is an experience, that is the first thing. It is not possible to give expression to love just by describing it. To feel love for all that is around you, you must be able to see the divinity in all beings. And to see the oneness of divinity, the heart must be pure and the mind must be stable. The state of love you have described is something you experience spontaneously, it is not something you can work towards through the intellect. However, as long as your mind is held by its attachments to various objects and people and is attracted to the transient affairs of life, you will never have this experience. So to awaken a true feeling of love for the entire creation, your whole being has to undergo a thorough cleansing.

Is there any specific practice that one can perform for immediate relief from feelings such as anxiety, grief, remorse, jealousy, guilt, envy, fear and so on?

One should practise awareness of the natural breath. This will bring immediate relief.

My adolescent daughter is not happy. She is an underachiever in school, angry at home, has few if any friends and is refusing any help. What do you suggest for her?

When your children have gone out of your hands and they need help, then you should encourage them to try ashram life for some time. If you expose your child to ashram life, a different environment, different people, different activities, freedom of speech, thought and deed, and then expose them to asanas and pranayama, you will soon find them reacting positively.

7

Sadhana

Do you recommend the practices of yama and niyama?

When we begin practising yoga and meditation, we try our level best to stop the dissipation of energy. The yamas and niyamas are usually recommended for this, but of course not everyone is able to practise them. I think we have to express everything in our lives and let the yamas and niyamas occur naturally. If we try to develop them by restraint, we are likely to be suppressing and we may be causing more harm than good. Many people try to practise yama and niyama and they force themselves into a rather rigorous situation.

It is not bad to be truthful, it is not bad to be non-violent, but sometimes we are not able to handle the psycho-emotional situations arising in our life through the practice of these dharmas. Therefore, in order to handle this situation we have to first purify the whole body and the whole group of nadis. That is why in hatha yoga we have the system of purification of ida and pingala. When we are able to create harmony and equilibrium between the mental and pranic forces in our system, these great dharmas, these great observances in the raja yoga of Patanjali, become very natural and spontaneous.

The spadework which we have to do in order to make yama and niyama the natural expression of our being is the practice of hatha yoga. Purification of the 72,000 nadis, which carry the computerized impulses throughout the body, and

the six hatha yoga body purification techniques create a psycho-biological harmony, and this harmony ultimately creates spontaneity of the positive dharma in us.

I am peaceful within and without, not because I am forcing myself to be, but on account of the great transformation that has taken place in the structure of my psycho-biological system. It has become my nature to be non-violent and full of love and understanding. In the same way, I do not have to force myself to practise brahmacharya, because my body has been purified. My psychological and emotional structure has been properly adjusted by balancing the impulses of ida and pingala. Therefore, I am able to retain the hormones in the higher centres. So brahmacharya has become a spontaneous and natural expression of my consciousness. I don't have to practise it, it is my nature. This is how a positive dharma has to be developed in the form of yama and niyama.

When we realize that yoga is so beneficial, why can we never find time to practise it adequately?

In all the modern cities of the world there is an idea of having no time and people think they cannot find time to practise yoga every day. Secondly, they are very tired, they go to sleep very late and consequently they wake up late. The day has a particular cycle in which the pranic rhythms gradually increase from four am and reach their peak at midday. From midday to four pm the prana is static, and then it starts to diminish after four pm. After sunset it falls very rapidly and from midnight to four am it is minimal. We, however, are not acting according to this cycle, and that is why we are often tired and unable to fulfil our daily commitments.

If you go to bed at midnight how can you get up at four am? If you don't get up early, how will you be able to practise yoga? You will be too busy rushing around the house preparing to go to work.

Yoga teachers in the modern cities have to adjust their lifestyles so they can set an example for their students. The students can then be coaxed into establishing some sort of

rhythm in their day-to-day life, and this will enable them to become regular in their yogic sadhana.

How is it possible for a householder to devote as much time to yoga as a sannyasin?

This question relates to a great misunderstanding that has been continuing for centuries and centuries. Yoga is not for sannyasins, it is only for householders. The tensions, anxieties and depressions of the mind, body and nervous system are caused by man's involvement in this confounded life. For a sannyasin there is interaction but less involvement.

Medicine is not for a healthy person, it is for one who is unhealthy. In the same way, mental discipline or perfect health, if these are the meaning of yoga, are for those people who have no discipline in life. This not only applies to householders, but to anyone who is exposed to life, whether married or unmarried, young or old. If you are involved in the diversity of life, then yoga is for you.

According to the *Bhagavad Gita* and other well known scriptures, there are two paths: one is the path of involvement in life, and the other is renunciation. A person involved in life is following the *pravritti marga*. When a person retires and completely withdraws himself from this life into his own world, it is known as *nivritti marga*. Most people belong to the pravritti path because they have something to accomplish, something to pursue in life. In their everyday interactions they face pressure, pain, happiness, sorrow, success, failure, birth and death. Only a handful of people belong to the nivritti marga, and for them yoga is as unnecessary as an overcoat in Nigeria during summer.

There is also another misunderstanding in the minds of people. They think that the practices of raja yoga demand a disciplined, ethical and moral life with certain dietary restrictions and so on. This is not true. In fact, the very structure of yoga is designed for those people who are full of all kinds of personality disorders. For example, the first chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* is known as 'The Yoga of the Dejection of

Arjuna'. It is the yoga of disappointment and actually yoga begins with the person who is depressed and confused.

When a householder devotee has provided enough security for his wife and family, would it be best for him to give up his job and devote himself to full time spiritual life?

A householder must remember one thing. Even if he lives with his wife and family, he can still pursue spiritual life. It is not necessary for him to leave them or renounce his day-to-day activities. It is also not necessary for him to seclude himself. He should live with his family, perform his daily duties and practise sadhana early in the morning and at night. From time to time he should go to the ashram, either alone or with his family, live there for fifteen days or a month and practise intense sadhana.

Just by practising raja yoga and jnana yoga you will not gain enlightenment. You have to work, live with your wife and children, and exhaust your karma.

Which is the best way to find the most suitable technique for one's spiritual development?

As so many techniques are being praised and taught these days, it is very difficult for an individual to select a path for himself. There are different systems of meditation for the tamasic, rajasic and sattwic temperaments, so first of all you must determine to which of these categories you belong.

Generally, we give a mantra to the spiritual aspirant and tell him to practise it for a specific period. If his mind becomes very quiet while practising japa, he should understand that he belongs to the sattwic temperament. If his mind is restless throughout the practice, he belongs to the rajasic temperament. And if during japa, he just sleeps and the mala falls from his hand, then he belongs to the tamasic temperament.

Before an aspirant decides the state of his evolution, he should also practise hatha yoga and karma yoga. If he finds that he is tamasic, he should continue with these practices. If

he is rajasic, his sadhana should consist of bhakti and karma yoga and a little bit of raja yoga. And if he is sattwic, he doesn't need any of these practices; dhyana alone is enough.

Why is it necessary to get up early in the morning to practise sadhana?

Why is it necessary to change the time in Europe to one hour earlier? It is concerned with the energy crisis. Similarly, getting up early in the morning is also concerned with an energy crisis; the lack of internal energy that many of us feel.

The brain has many energy patterns which are cyclic and work like a clock. At one time a certain cycle is at its maximum point, while another cycle may be near its minimum. The energy is at different levels during the twenty-four hour period, as well as varying with the seasons and with many other factors known and unknown.

Between two and four o'clock, the energy level is at its lowest point. This is the time when heart attacks and birth deliveries are most commonly reported. Therefore, if you wake up in the morning and practise yoga, you will increase the energy level. You will be less prone to heart attack, because meditation is an antidote to stress, and helps us to reverse the processes which are thought to lead up to heart attack. If you keep on sleeping, your physical body will run all day at a low energy level.

Between four and six o'clock there are certain secretions in this physical body which are necessary for concentration and meditation. Scientists know about a few of these. They tell us that stress hormones are pumped into the body at this time. This implies that we are more susceptible to fear, as well as being more sensitive to other subtle cosmic energies. After six o'clock there are disturbances which are not conducive to sadhana. The rays of the sun, for example, disturb the molecules of the brain.

Scientists are now becoming aware of the internal body cycles and the importance of maintaining them for health and clarity of mind. Their recent discoveries related to body hormones point out that chemicals in the brain are responsible, not only for how we feel physically, but also for our mental

state and our perception of our environment, and of who we are at any given moment. They are searching for some means to control the internal secretions in order to remove many of the forms of suffering, from psychosis and drug addiction to chronic pain and anxiety. They are producing chemicals to turn emotions on and off, to enhance memory and alertness. This is the only way they can contact and try to control the internal environment.

Yogis were also aware of the importance of the internal environment, of keeping it clean and pure, and of manipulating it so as to produce an atmosphere which is conducive to the higher experience. They developed methods of naturally regulating brain chemicals so as to optimize our ability to tap human potential. Getting up early in the morning was a part of their sadhana and lifestyle. It is a means to manipulate the internal body secretions so that we can flow more smoothly from day-to-day as well as being more open to the spiritual experience. The best time to practise sadhana is between 4 am and 6 am. In India we call this period *brahmamuhurta*. It is the time of day which is most auspicious for the practice of any spiritual sadhana. At this time only sadhakas are up and everyone else is sleeping.

If brahmamuhurta occurs only in the early morning before sunrise, what about the people living at the North Pole?

Brahmamuhurta is not necessarily related to the rising of the sun. Even at the North Pole, where people do not see the sun for days together, they still have a time for sleeping and waking. When they wake up, they practise their sadhana and that is brahmamuhurta for them.

If a person practises yoga for eight hours every day, how much time should he give to different practices and how must he develop from one stage to the next?

Your question is so simple. There are many things to eat, but how to eat them all? There are many systems in yoga, but they are not all meant for you. There is karma yoga, bhakti

yoga, raja yoga, laya yoga, kundalini yoga, hatha yoga, mantra yoga, kriya yoga and jnana yoga, and all have their own set of practices. These systems are classified according to the nature, temperament and capacity of an individual.

Anyone who wants to reap the benefits of yoga should practise asanas for ten minutes, pranayama for three to five minutes and concentration for ten minutes. One need only dedicate half an hour daily to the practices of yoga. If the practice of concentration is done regularly and sincerely with correct understanding, ten minutes practice is enough. Results have even been noticed in five minutes. Anyone who subjects himself to seven or eight hours of yoga is overdoing it. Even sannyasins who have completely renounced the world are not allowed to practise for such extended periods of time.

What should we practise in this half hour?

There are many yogasanas which you can do. I will name only those which suit practically everybody.

Children, young people and older people who are used to exercise should practise surya namaskara every day. It is a dynamic exercise which has beneficial and vitalizing effects on all parts of the body and mind.

The second asana is called vajrasana. It is a very relaxing position, both physically and mentally, and it also stimulates the digestive processes, especially if assumed for a few minutes after meals. In this posture the legs are folded back underneath the buttocks in a sitting position and the hands are placed on top of the legs near the knees.

The third asana, shashankasana, can be assumed from the basic position of vajrasana by bending forward and placing the forehead and arms on the floor. Shashankasana is especially recommended for people with stiff backs or digestive disorders such as constipation and indigestion. It is one of the best asanas for invigorating the whole brain.

The fourth asana is ardha matsyendrasana, the spinal twist pose. It should be included in your set of practices to ensure the spinal column is given a good twist in both direc-

tions. It will supplement the forward and backward bending movements of the other asanas. As well as manipulating the spinal cord it is also very good for the abdominal organs and the muscles and nerves of the back.

The fifth asana is paschimottanasana. Sit down with your legs together and stretched out in front of the body. Bend forward and with both arms straight, try to touch the toes. Hold the final pose, without bending the knees, for as long as you can. Just hold it for ten to thirty seconds at first, then release the posture. Repeat it a number of times, then finally lie down in shavasana, the dead man's pose, and for one or two minutes do not move the body at all.

These are the basic asanas which can be practised by every body. There are some other practices which are necessary for older men and women, invalids, overweight people, or anyone who cannot manage the more advanced asanas. Such people should practise the series of exercises called pawanmuktasana. These exercises are designed to remove gastric and rheumatic problems. *Parwan* means wind, acid or gas, and *mukta* means release or free. The pawanmuktasana exercises are very simple movements which even people of eighty or ninety can do. They make the whole body supple and in many ways they are similar to physiotherapy exercises.

The practice of pranayama need only take five minutes. There are two important techniques. One is called nadi shodhana pranayama, alternate nostril breathing. Slowly breathe in through the left nostril and out through the right nostril, then breathe in through the right nostril and out through the left. This makes one round. You should practise five rounds, but it must be done systematically and correctly. Therefore it is better to learn it from an experienced teacher.

Another easier pranayama is called ujjayi, which is done by contracting the epiglottis. It is the same type of breathing one does in deep sleep. It is like mild snoring. The sound appears to be emanating from the throat, but the mouth is closed. It is long, deep, sonorous breathing. If you watch a young child sleeping, you will see a fine demonstration of ujjayi.

In the beginning choose one of these practices and make it part of your regular schedule. There are other techniques such as bhastrika, but they must be learned from an experienced teacher to ensure that you don't do anything which may result in harmful side effects.

The third set of practices is for concentration of mind. Base your concentration on your personality. For example, if your mind is restless or will not allow you to sit down for a short time, then you must practise mantra and antar mouna. Do not suppress or discard your thoughts. Witness the whole thought process without creating any barrier, but at the same time go on repeating your mantra.

People who have a rajasic temperament will always be restless. They cannot still the mind even for a second. Sometimes when they practise Om chanting, for the whole five minutes their mind will be thinking about horrible things from the past, whereas on other days it will be very good. Nevertheless, they should continue to practise and try to develop the ability to remain a witness of their thoughts.

People with a sattvic temperament do not have so many problems with the mind and rarely experience restlessness. These people should practise concentration in the mid-eye-brow centre, trying to visualize a symbol of their own choice, such as a yantra, mandala or their ishta devata.

People who are tamasic in nature start dozing or dreaming whenever they sit for concentration. They should not try to withdraw the mind, because the moment they close their eyes to practise japa, they start to see visions and many other things. For them, loud chanting of mantra or kirtan is best.

One must choose the practice of concentration according to their state of evolution. Whenever you practise your sadhana, you should begin and end by chanting Om aloud.

Why do you recommend only ten minutes of yoga practice?

The reason I say ten minutes is simple. Over the last thirty years the industrial revolution has been growing steadily and life has totally changed. Previously people were more free.

Now, even if people want to devote their whole life to yoga and spiritual achievements, they are not able to do so. They cannot even spare ten minutes for asanas and pranayama. Therefore, I have come to the conclusion that people with spiritual aspirations should start with the minimum amount of time. Instead of trying to devote two or three hours every day, which will gradually come down to nil anyway, it is preferable to first start with ten minutes, so that in the course of time all your energies and interests are crystallized. Then automatically the time of practice will increase according to your necessity, capacity and motivation.

Some people say that when yoga is wrongly practised, it can be harmful. What do you have to say about this?

Nothing wrong can happen because in the yoga practices nature has created bumper bars or shock absorbers. If you practise asanas incorrectly, or you overdo pranayama, there are signals or symptoms which immediately compel you to stop. Anyone who declares that yoga can be harmful has not practised it themselves. To give you an example, if you begin to practise pranayama and in your enthusiasm you over-practise breath retention, within a few days you will have absolutely no desire to practise it at all. This is because the inner structure of the body has a built-in defence mechanism. Just as you don't feel like eating when you have indigestion, in the same way if you are practising asanas and pranayama wrongly, then nature will create a condition in your mind whereby you will not want to practise again until you find someone to teach you properly.

What is the role of the sicknesses that can arise as sadhana continues? And what should be our approach to sickness in general?

Sickness indicates expulsion of impurities from the body. Expulsion of toxic matter is the first law of nature. The second point about sickness is that it leads one to appreciate that there is something wrong in the pattern of their daily life,

either in the realm of their thinking or in the realm of their eating or habits. Somewhere, something is wrong.

When you practise sadhana and you have some type of sickness, you must first of all understand that you are working out the process of your karma. And when you are sick, remember that the days of sickness are the days of blessings. When the mind becomes calm and quiet, there is no passion, there is no fantasy, and all turbulence subsides. Sickness brings serenity of mind.

I don't feel like practising pooja or chanting mantra. I only feel like doing naam smarana and dhyana. Is this spiritual progress or retardation?

In Sanatana dharma, a mild form of yoga known as pooja is given in the early stages. Pooja is a form of pratyahara sadhana. If you have read about raja yoga, you will know what I mean. It is not a high-powered act. It is necessary for those men, women and children who have tender minds. In Sanatana dharma, the stronger mode of pratyahara is not given to everybody. Only after practising the milder form for a sustained period should the aspirant become consistent in one kind of sadhana like *naam japa*, japa of the Lord's name, *naam smarana*, remembrance of the Lord's name, or *naam sankirtan*, singing the Lord's name. These practices are capable of raising your mind to the heights of dhyana and samadhi. Any or all of these three can definitely be used to transcend the barriers of time, space and object in order to reach your final destination.

What can singing and kirtan do for spiritual development?

Singing kirtan and spiritual songs is an important part of nada yoga. It is also a powerful way of attaining *pratyahara*, a state in which the senses are withdrawn. Once pratyahara is experienced, you can start concentrating the mind.

What is the importance of darshan in our spiritual development?

In India the word *darshan* means to see with the eyes. But is this the only way of perception? As long as we see with the eyes only, our communication is limited to the physical body. It is important therefore that we develop the other forms of perception. A scientist sees matter with his eyes, but he also sees the energy potential in matter and that is why he is able to liberate the energy from the matter. So *darshan* also means vision of the greater reality behind the material body.

It is said in India that an aspirant must make himself broad, homogeneous and great. If you are sensual, you are only aware of the physical body, but when the mind moves into the spiritual body, it becomes greater and wider. This is the secret of how the guru's *darshan* is able to influence the evolution of the disciple.

When disciples come before the guru for *darshan*, their personalities are able to interact with his presence. Whatever he says to them is not from the intellectual level, it is not to tell them how much he knows, but to give inspiration that will help them in their personal spiritual development. In fact, he has to say what he says.

It is like the mother who cooks food for her children. She does not do this to display her expertise to the children, but to see that they are healthy, well fed and enjoying their meals. If you want to understand what selflessness is, observe a mother. The mother has no personality for herself. She symbolizes dedication, sacrifice and love.

This is exactly the attitude of guru for disciple during *darshan*. The guru has to be selfless, sacrificing and full of love. He has to express his heart, personality and love. Likewise, the disciple also opens himself up to the guru. If the guru, being aware of his intellectual supremacy or holiness, tries to drub that into the mind of the disciple, then he is a teacher and not a guru. The question of how great I am or how stupid you are does not arise here. In the realm of love, wisdom and idiosyncrasies do not count.

How can the spiritual aspirant cultivate the awakening of siddhis?

The purpose of spiritual sadhana is to attain the highest consciousness, not to obtain psychic powers or *siddhis*. Siddhis are very low on the scale of spiritual development and yoga is very clear about powers such as telepathy, clairvoyance and clairsaudience. They bring the aspirant down. This is the reason why many people who have the capacity to exhibit psychic powers or siddhis will not do so.

According to yoga there are eight siddhis, but it is made very clear that one should not demonstrate them. A yogi who refrains from displaying his powers becomes fully illumined, and thereby capable of working directly on the karma of his disciples. If the yogi uses his powers, he is then unable to counteract his disciples' karma. Further, if the yogi is able to help his disciples by the use of his siddhis, the cause of the trouble, the karma, will not be eliminated. The disciple is also liable to become lazy and inactive. So, through not using his siddhis the yogi has an accumulation of spiritual power which he utilizes to help his disciples work through their karma.

Are there many individuals who have attained the psychic powers described in Patanjali's 'Vibhooti Pada', or is the whole idea only an imaginative concept on a different plane?

The different *vibhootis*, or psychic powers, of which we read about in yoga are possible. There have been and there will continue to be people who have these powers, but those who do not want to believe in them will never be convinced.

These vibhootis come to a sadhaka in order to prove that he is on the way. The strict instructions are that he should not demonstrate these powers. Hanuman and others who were master siddhas only used their powers when it was absolutely essential. Vibhootis should not be used. If you have them, it is better to remain quiet about them.

Can you tell us about astral travel?

In order to travel outside the body it is very important that you have someone to guide you. There should be a controller who can bring the consciousness back when it goes out of the body, otherwise there is a danger that it will become entangled in some other sphere. I will tell you a true story which will illustrate the point.

Once Shankaracharya, the founder of Adwaita philosophy, was confronted by a learned lady. She challenged him to a debate and in order to exalt herself she questioned him on matters related to sex. As you know, Shankaracharya was a sannyasin, a brahmachari. So he asked her for some time to prepare his answers. Then he entered the body of a dead king, and with the queen he had many personal experiences. However, he forgot all about his own body, which remained in a cave under the care of his disciples. Shankaracharya was so much in bliss with the queen that he forgot all about his body, his disciples and the contest.

Meanwhile, the queen and the people of the court were puzzled by the strange conduct of the king. He was behaving like a great sannyasin. The queen began to make enquiries as to who this man was. She dispatched soldiers throughout the state to see if they could find the body of a dead swami anywhere. If they found such a body, they were instructed to destroy it so its owner could not return to it. When the soldiers were in the vicinity, Shankaracharya's disciples came to know about the investigation and they were very much afraid. One of them began to chant mantras that had the power to draw their master back to his body.

Therefore, if you want to commence astral travel, you must have an expert controller; otherwise you don't know what might happen to you. Astral travelling has nothing to do with meditation, it is completely separate. When meditation becomes very deep, the self is revealed. I'm not talking about the body or mind, but the spirit. This revelation is known as self-realization, and it is only after this experience has been attained that astral travelling should be attempted.

Is the aim of sadhana perfection in life?

Perfection implies greatness of your being. If you aren't perfect, you are unhappy, discontented. Perfection is our aim. Everybody has to try to perfect themselves by devoting some time to meditation. To put it another way, everything starts happening when you close your eyes. Nothing happens when you open your eyes because then you are living in the sensory world which is empirical and transitory. You are living in a world that is known by the mind, and what is comprehended by the mind is short-lived. When you look within, the inner space becomes visible. The saints and sages have told us time and time again that the real life is within. What does it mean? What about this life, this drama, this existence? Is it not here? Yes, it is, but it is not the ultimate. It is not real; it is the shadow of your inner life.

What you see in a mirror is the reflection of your face. In the same manner, this external life, this external world, is a reflection of your inner life. If you are shaving yourself, you don't shave the reflection in the mirror, you have to shave your face. The external life which you experience day in and day out is a reflection of some inner life about which you have been totally ignorant. You have only been dealing with the reflection or the shadow.

Meditation puts you in touch with your real being. Without this, it is not possible to know your real self. There is a gap between the external life and the internal life, and there has to be something to traverse the gap. Meditation bridges the gap in our lives. Once we are able to visualize the inner light, the external life becomes veritable happiness. Then you don't miss anything, even if you have nothing.

Is it possible to fail in this quest for enlightenment, or is there no such thing as complete failure?

Consciousness as a whole is moving forward, not backward. Evolution and progress are the law, retrogression is not. Not only for the human being, but also in every kingdom, the hidden structure of matter is automatically unfolding in

stages. As such, enlightenment, illumination, realization, or nirvikalpa samadhi is a destiny which everyone has to realize sooner or later.

Therefore, as far as I can see, it is possible for anyone, but on account of our own mental patterns sometimes we feel that we are a little distant. That is just a feeling people have created for themselves. Or maybe society has tried to create this kind of guilt in man in order to dominate the erratic mind, the erratic mob. In order to control the millions of people who can educate, who can fight and kill, and who can disturb the law and order, the kings, rulers, statesman and military commanders created a band of religious men and priests to instil the notion of divine retribution: "If you don't do what we say, you'll get this or that. If you don't do it, you'll fall back." So the people thought, "We don't want to be thrown back, we had better do what they say."

To maintain complete political control over the masses, this idea of retrogression was introduced, not only in Christianity, but in most religions, including Hinduism. But we sannyasins are very actively exploding this myth. There is no returning, there is no falling back or failure. And if at all there is a fall, I think it is a fall into enlightenment.

My wish is not to renounce, but my life is totally absorbed in yoga. Will I have the same opportunity of realization as a sannyasin?

Realization is available to everybody, even if one is not a sannyasin. If one thinks that by sannyasa alone one will become realized, it is not correct. A householder can definitely realize. A person who is living a non-spiritual life can realize. One who is weak in mind or body, or who is very poor can also realize. Even an idiot can realize. Realization is enlightenment from within, and everyone has the spark of realization within themselves.

The potential for enlightenment does not vary in degree from person to person. It is in equal proportion in everyone from the idiot to the wise man, from the sinner to the saint

and from the poorest man to the wealthiest person on earth. So if this quantum of spiritual potential is equal in all of us, then our chances must be the same. The only difference may be in our paths. You may want to go through the path of involvement while I choose the path of retirement. Some people want involvement in sensory life and other people can't have it. It all depends on one's temperament. Sannyasa is one way and householder life is another. Householder life is the long way, whereas sannyasa life is the swift way. It is the jet set path. So go your own way, please.

Can one reach the goal of self-realization through the paths of jnana or bhakti yoga?

Self-realization cannot be reached by any yoga because it is not a distance. It is a state of mind, a state of consciousness which is here even now. You don't have to go a long way. Karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga and dhyana yoga do not lead one to self-realization. If you want to go to Bombay from Madras, the train will take you to Bombay, but if you have to go to America, that train will only lead you towards America. From Bombay you will have to take a flight to Frankfurt, then another plane to London and a third flight to your destination. From the airport you will then have to travel to your hotel by car or underground railway, and so on. In the same manner, karma yoga purifies the chitta; bhakti yoga eliminates distractions of the mind; jnana yoga removes avidya; hatha yoga removes the possibility of suspension of mind, *laya avastha*, and raja yoga helps to integrate and concentrate the wandering tendencies of the mind. That's all.

Even after you have attained these states, self-realization cannot be assured because these yogas are negative practices. Here I am using the word negative in a very positive sense. If I want to show a very important person into this room, first I will paint it, clean it and then make everything neat and tidy, so that when he comes he feels at home. In the same way, these different paths of yoga purify the chitta, but you must know how to get in.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* there is a sloka which clearly points out that no yoga or no way can lead you directly to the point of self-realization. Why? Because all the sadhanas belong to the realm of the mind and the state of self-realization, *atman*, is not a mental state. How can a mental practice lead you to a non-mental state? Jnana yoga, nada yoga, mantra, dharana and dhyana are practised through your mind.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna says to Arjuna, “After you have practised yoga, after you have perfected yoga and come to a certain point of evolution when the mind has been rendered subtle and pure, then I will give you buddhi yoga.” This buddhi yoga is grace. It is not intellectual yoga. It is not intelligence or the normal buddhi through which you know right and wrong. Here buddhi means a yoga which is in the form of enlightenment.

There is a higher point of termination in yoga, when a certain vision or revelation is given to the sadhaka. It is not due to yoga. Yoga has cleaned the mirror so that in its purity it now reflects the light for you to see. With the experience of that enlightenment on an absolutely purified chitta, then you come to me. Self-realization does not depend upon the practices of yoga. If you can believe in me, then you can drop all sadhanas. If you can understand that sadhana and self-realization are two completely different subjects, and if you can convince yourself that even without sadhana you can have self-realization, then you will have it.



8

Meditation

When we practise meditation techniques are we really meditating?

We have been using the word meditation, but in actual fact whatever system we follow, we are not practising meditation but preparing for meditation. Meditation means awareness of the self, not awareness of the meditator or the process of meditation. Awareness of the object of meditation, the meditator, and the process of meditation have to be transcended, then meditation happens spontaneously.

Can one start to practise meditation without having practised any preliminary stages?

If you are able to sit quietly for ten minutes without any problem in the body, then you can start meditation directly.

In what way is meditation different from hypnosis?

Meditation belongs to the state of spiritual consciousness, whereas hypnotism belongs to the state of mental consciousness. In hypnosis you withdraw the mental consciousness and the mind undergoes a state of rigor mortis. There is no expansion of mind, but there is a lot of drama. In meditation it is just the opposite; there is no withdrawal, there is expansion of consciousness. The consciousness which was subject to time, space and object expands beyond the borders of the mind and beyond the frontiers of name, space and form.

In hypnosis the inner consciousness does not become effulgent, whereas in meditation the inner consciousness is full, complete and homogeneous; it is total. In hypnosis the process of knowledge comes to a point of cessation, but in meditation the process of knowledge begins. Another important point is that a person who comes out of hypnosis is a subject, whereas a person who comes out of meditation is a guru, a master. That is the very fundamental difference.

When you come out of hypnosis, your qualities are dormant and you are a suppressed human being. You cannot do anything with conviction and confidence. Unless your controller tells you to do something, you can't do it. You are an undeveloped personality when you come out of hypnosis, and therefore hypnosis can also be responsible for mental retardation. On the other hand, when you practise meditation, your soul becomes effulgent, your consciousness expands. You develop confidence and conviction, and you become a master of the processes of the mind. You are in control, you are the master of the situations of your life and it is you who makes all the decisions, not somebody else. Even your guru becomes a second entity because you become the guru of your own self.

Do you think religion can be an impediment to the practice of meditation?

Every religion has a spiritual aspect and a social aspect. The social aspect of a religion is an impediment in the path of meditation but the spiritual aspect is not.

Apart from the relaxation and health benefits, is there a deeper purpose for practising meditation?

The purpose of meditation is to develop super-awareness which should take charge of all the affairs of life, replacing the mind, just as in presidential rule the governor takes charge of all the affairs of state when the cabinet does not function. In the same way, when we know that this mind is not able to conduct the affairs of life properly, when it is creating torture, agony and suffering, we say, "No, the mind is not

a good director.” The limited mind must be replaced by a super-power, super-awareness, but the problem is that there is no super-awareness. Therefore, we practise meditation to develop intuitive awareness.

Is position important in meditation?

In the beginning you can practise in a chair or any posture, but when you are regular with meditation and when you are practising it for longer periods of time, then you must sit in padmasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana. Siddhasana is for men and siddha yoni asana is for women.

During intense meditation, when the mind is dropping and when tranquillity is coming fast, coronary behaviour slackens, blood pressure drops and the nervous tensions and impulses decrease. This is good, but only to some extent. The blood pressure should not fall too much, otherwise there will be depression in the nervous system. To prevent this you must practise siddhasana or siddha yoni asana. In siddhasana the perineum is pressed. This influences the level of the testosterone hormone in the body, which in turn regulates the blood pressure and controls the impulses of the nervous system, ensuring that nervous depression will not result.

So serious practitioners should master padmasana first and then become adepts at siddhasana or siddha yoni asana.

Can the position of the body be changed if the legs become numb or cramped?

Numbness of the legs is a great difficulty in meditation. When this happens, no matter how well the meditation is going, you must break it and stretch the legs. Numbness is caused by an obstruction in the circulation. If it is allowed to continue over a period of years (one or two months does not matter), paralysis will set in.

You cannot ignore the physical laws, but you can find out what is obstructing the circulation. Perhaps the blood vessels are constricted, or there is fat deposited somewhere en route.

You may have varicose veins, or the structure of your body may be such that there is extra pressure on the extremities. Whatever the case, you will have to adjust the position of your body.

For meditation practice, one should be seated on something which is not too soft or comfortable. It should be hard like a carpet. Usually we sit on a blanket, deer skin or piece of cloth. You can also use a dhoti or small blanket folded several times and placed underneath the buttocks so they are slightly higher than the knees. When the knees are higher, circulation is more difficult.

If there is cramping of the legs during meditation, it is better to break the practice. Cramping is often caused by a high level of uric acid in the system. People from European countries and modern Indians have this problem because they eat a lot of meat, onions and dairy products. This is why traditional yoga practitioners in India avoid meat, not because we consider it sinful, but because we consider it non-conducive to meditation. If your body contains a lot of uric acid, there will be stiffness in the joints and the knees will start to pain very quickly when you sit for meditation.

This difficulty can be eradicated by reducing your intake of uric acid. Cut down on salt, fat, meat and dairy products, and avoid eating onions too frequently. You may not notice immediate improvement and be able to sit for two or three hours, but you will surely manage fifteen to thirty minutes.

Why do sannyasins sit on a deer or tiger skin for meditation?

There are many reasons why these skins are used for meditation and any aspirant may sit on them. Firstly, the skin represents the animal nature of man. Hence, sitting on the skin symbolizes sitting over and controlling one's animal tendencies.

Secondly, sannyasins used to practise long hours of meditation in the forests where they were exposed to all sorts of

wild animals and insects. They sat on an animal skin because it had a powerful scent which warded off animals, snakes, scorpions and other creatures.

Thirdly, the tiger is a very powerful animal. If you look at one, you will feel its powerful magnetism. The skin retains some of the magnetism and if you sit on it, you are automatically enclosed in its electromagnetic field.

Fourthly, when you sit in meditation for long periods, the heart rate and the circulatory system slow down, the inner body temperature drops, and in particular, the lower part of the body becomes cold. The skin acts as insulation, keeping the body, especially the lower part, warm.

Beginners can start their meditation practices by sitting on a simple cloth and then as they progress and extend their periods of practice, they can use a deer skin. Once they are able to sit in meditation for hours, they can use a tiger skin. However, in India the tradition is that those who do not practise yoga regularly use a grass or cloth mat for meditation, householders who are involved in yogic practices use a deer skin, and sannyasins use a tiger skin.

Can we sit against a wall for meditation?

You should not sit against a wall. If you are not able to sit unsupported for an hour, sit for ten minutes. Then you can adjust your position and again sit erect for ten minutes. The spinal cord, particularly the sacro-iliac joints, has to be strengthened, and this cannot be done if you continue using a wall for support.

During meditation, is the position of the hands important? If so, what is the best position?

If both nostrils are not flowing freely, the position of the hands should be as follows. Place the right hand under the left armpit and the left hand under the right armpit and press. The arms should be relaxed. This is called swara yoga mudra. At the time of meditation both nostrils must flow freely. If they do not, then one part of the brain remains inactive and you

cannot meditate properly. When both the nostrils flow freely, both hemispheres of the brain are equally active and meditation can be accomplished without any difficulty.

If, however, both nostrils are flowing freely when you sit for meditation, you can adopt chin mudra, with the thumb and the index finger joined and the remaining three fingers separated. This symbolizes the separation of yourself (index fingers) from the three gunas of rajas, tamas and sattwa, and the joining of yourself to the supreme consciousness (thumb).

What is the importance of kaya sthairyam?

Kaya means body and *sthairyam* means stability or steadiness. When you sit for meditation, the body should not move. It should become immobile like a statue. This is the first sadhana one has to practise.

Many people come to me for spondylitis or back pain, and often I just tell them to sit perfectly motionless, the first day for one minute, second day for two minutes, after one week seven minutes, and so forth. Keep repeating to yourself, “No movement, become like a statue.” This is the simplest way to get rid of many diseases of the back and spinal column.

What happens when you make the body very still? The heart becomes normalized because you relieve the pressure. The nervous system, ida and pingala are harmonized. During the period of immobility, the flow of prana and consciousness throughout the 72,000 nadis is not required for the functioning of the body at any particular point, so it is withdrawn. This helps in meditation. Kaya sthairyam is the first thing that the meditator must acquire. The best position for this practice is siddhasana, then padmasana, bhadrasana, and finally sukhasana.

For how long should one practise meditation each day?

I have a definite answer for this. For meditation, I recommend minimal practice since I believe in quality, not quantity. One small bomb can do the work of ten big guns! Therefore, you

can accomplish in five minutes as much as you might accomplish in one hour if you practise with total integration of the different facets of your personality.

If you have many attachments to life, if you have plenty of commitments, and if life is what you want, then the period of meditation should be short. But if you have perfected your detachment, if life has no attraction for you, and if your mind has become comparatively quiet and tranquil, then you can practise as long as you want. I have been teaching yoga for the past thirty or thirty-five years and I think that ten minutes is the right time for everyone. As one evolves and throws off the material attachments, one can increase the period.

Does exploration of the spiritual realm come more easily to an introverted person than to an extroverted one?

Spiritual insight or awareness comes to an introverted person much sooner than it comes to an extroverted person, but the introverted person will find it difficult to maintain the continuous flow of awareness required during meditation. Therefore, in yoga we try to make people more extrovert by awakening and widening the scope of their sensory activities. We give them practices which will develop the five *jnanendriyas* or sense organs.

At a particular stage of his evolution, a yogi becomes very extroverted. By this I do not mean that he is engrossed in sensual life, but that he becomes aware of external things, everything which can be received by his senses. I believe that a person whose senses are extroverted can reach spiritual heights more easily and quickly than an introverted person. Therefore, a person who is introverted will have to externalize and develop his sensory perceptions. Once they have become keen he can introvert them.

In the ashram, if I find introverted sannyasins or students practising a lot of meditation, I stop them. I say, "Don't do it, you do not know how to control or manipulate the mind. What if your mind dives deep while you are doing all this meditation? Have you the capacity to bring it out again?" The mind should not be introverted unless it has been externalized

first. Introversion is a psychological problem and it is also a spiritual disqualification.

What is the difference between the meditation practices which are a part of tantra and those which belong to raja yoga?

Raja yoga is an offshoot of tantra, but there is a slight difference between the tantric system and the raja yoga system. In raja yoga there is emphasis on concentration and control of the mind by voluntary efforts. In tantra there is no insistence on concentration and self-control; the mind is left to itself. Antar mouna is an important practice of tantra, because in this technique you do not try to control the activities of the mind; you just witness them. When control and concentration are involved, that is the raja yoga system. When the mind is allowed to function freely, that is the tantric system. In tantra, spiritual awareness is developed by indirect methods and in raja yoga it is directly influenced.

What is the difference between Zen meditation and yogic meditation?

First of all we should trace the origin of the word Zen. The Sanskrit word for meditation is *dhyana*. In Pali (the language which Buddha spoke), it is known as jnana. When Buddhism, which was essentially dhyana yoga, went to China, the people pronounced jnana as Ch'an. Then when Ch'an was introduced to the Japanese people, they called it Zen.

Now Zen meditation is not different from yogic meditation, because in the system of yoga we have many ways of practising meditation. In fact, in his *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali has said that one can meditate on anything one chooses. You can meditate on the light, on the life of a great saint, on the heart or some other point, or on an endless number of other things. Like this, there are many systems of meditation which suit the various temperaments of man.

The mental evolution is divided into five categories. The lowest one is the idiotic mind, that mind which cannot

conceive anything. Then there is the dissipated mind, that mind which is like the mind of a monkey. For a while it is thinking about one thing, then suddenly another, then again something else, and it will never come back to the first thing. A mind which has no centre is called a dissipated mind. A little bit higher and more evolved is the oscillating mind, like that of a pendulum. The oscillating mind has a centre; it may go out but again it comes back. It is a distracted mind. Higher than this mind is the one-pointed mind, that mind which can focus on one thing at a time for a given period. The ultimate stage is the mind which is absolutely withdrawn and can be switched off.

If a person has a dissipated mind and you ask him to practise kundalini yoga, do you believe that he can do it? No. If you teach an idiot dhyana yoga, he will not be able to understand anything. If you ask me to practise Zen, I will say, "What's in it for me?" If I can think on one point for an hour, then Zen is not for me. If I can think on one point for twenty minutes, then antar mouna is not for me. If I can fix my mind at this point and switch off, then ajapa japa is not for me. But if I cannot think on one point even for a fraction of a second, then I will have to practise all other yogas and not meditation. Therefore, you cannot compare Zen and yoga. There can only be a choice according to your temperament.

What is a correct and systematic method of preparing for meditation?

Concentration and meditation come under raja yoga, and before you practise raja yoga you must purify the physical body by the techniques of hatha yoga. In yoga we believe that as far as possible, the causes of thought processes should be cleared up first through the physical medium. For example, sometimes a thought can be the outcome of a bad stomach or the effect of a thyroid malfunction. Therefore, we recommend the purifying techniques of hatha yoga. There are six hatha yoga cleansing techniques: neti, dhauti, basti, nauli, trataka and kapalbhati. They are called the *shatkarmas*. With

the guidance of an experienced teacher, you do these practices according to your requirements and capacity.

After you have practised the shatkarmas for one to two years, harmony is attained within the nervous system, the parasympathetic and sympathetic, ida and pingala nadis. They are responsible for *manas shakti*, mental energy, and *prana shakti*, vital energy, respectively. If either of these nadis is disturbed, then you have diseases born of either manas or prana shakti.

By hatha yoga, therefore, we are actually purifying all the flows so that they are homogeneous and uninterrupted. When this has been accomplished, you should then start concentration, for which a strong nervous system is imperative. When the flows in ida and pingala are correctly energized and balanced with respect to each other, the third flow, sushumna, is automatically activated. When this happens, meditation becomes spontaneous. However, this doesn't mean that you should not practise japa or that you should not do anything else now. You must continue with these things also, but if you are going to enter into meditation practice seriously, then you must do it systematically.

How does one achieve concentration?

Just as a passionate man thinks about a woman and a greedy man thinks about money all the time, in the same way, when the mind thinks only of one thing, it is transformed into willpower. Then the mind does not think, it wills. I do not think very much. When it is necessary I think, of course, and if it is not necessary, I don't. But most people think all the time, every moment of the day. Without even knowing how, they just think.

It takes many years to develop concentration and a state of thoughtlessness; it is not just a one year job. It could even take twenty-five to thirty years to develop, because concentration is a very high stage which requires a lot of preparation. If children start to learn concentration now, by the time they reach their father's age they will become very powerful.

However, there have been some people like Napoleon and Gandhi who were endowed with concentration power right from birth, but such people are very rare.

What is the importance of karma yoga in the path of meditation?

Karma yoga is the foundation of spiritual life. Man is bound by karma, but by the practice of karma yoga he can give expression to his karma in the right manner and he can transcend it. Without karma yoga, meditation, or for that matter any spiritual practice, will lead one to darkness.

Can kirtan be used as a practice to develop the experience of meditation?

You were singing a kirtan a little earlier. Had you continued it for another hour you would have definitely gone into meditation. Kirtan is the easiest, safest and best way to develop that deep supernatural state.

It's not always possible to meditate in a quiet environment. How can one resist the inner visualizations that occur when one hears the radio, songs, talking and so on in the background?

I think the best way is to let them come out through the process of antar mouna. If you try to resist or suppress them, they will form a fixed pattern or vibrations in your mind. If, for example, after hearing a piece of music, you are haunted by its vibrations, the best thing to do is let it pass through the areas of the mind.

In meditation, when you are trying to visualize a symbol and visions or thoughts interfere, should you watch them or put them aside and bring back the symbol?

A mind that is predominantly sattvic in nature will seldom wander during meditation practice. However, the majority of people are very disturbed by the worldly anxieties of day-to-day life and are under the influence of rajo and tamo gunas. As

such, various thoughts, visions and images constantly stream through their minds. Whenever this happens, you must allow them to continue and assume the attitude of a witness. Let them keep moving like the carriages of a train, but at the same time you must continue repeating your mantra. Don't try to eliminate the images or thoughts; just maintain the mantra as a base that you can keep coming back to.

Sometimes the pulse rate in my temples becomes very fast. Is it because I practise yoga and meditation for four to six hours daily?

This can happen when you practise meditation for long periods of time. The heart has to pump extra blood to the brain to cope with its extra activities. Therefore, it is better to reduce by half the amount of time you spend practising meditation.

During meditation something starts jumping in my body, then the body starts shaking. What is this?

It is perfectly alright but don't dwell on these happenings. Try to remain aware of the point of your concentration. With concentration many things can happen. If the mind is swayed by these psychic experiences and physical symptoms, it is a distraction from the main centre. However, sometimes in a state of meditation these disturbances become so powerful that it is useless to fight with them. It is better to find out the reason for their presence. Maybe you have not fulfilled some of the preliminary conditions of yoga or have not stabilized your nervous system or emotional structure.

What is the difference between the states of consciousness caused by drugs, and meditation?

Drug-induced experience totally deprives one of any control; one is helplessly tossed about by the emotions. Meditation, however, is a creative process which converts the chaos of uncontrolled feelings, thoughts and volitions into a centre of integrated psychic faculties in the depth of consciousness.

Moreover, the deleterious physiological and psychological effects result in deterioration of mental powers. Meditation is impossible unless you are ready for an expansion of consciousness, and not every person is ready. Drugs, however, can induce an experience for which one is not ready. The experience depends on the contents of the individual mind. The same drug may give one person a wonderful new experience and another a very frightening experience which overwhelms him.

Yoga is the safe and sure method of attaining mystical experiences, for it initially cleans and remoulds the whole mind and personality. It is based on the rich experiences attained by yogis throughout the ages, as well as modern scientific research.



9

The Practices of Meditation

Which is the most powerful meditation practice?

Well, it is very difficult to say which is the most powerful practice. You must try them all one by one and find out which is the best for you. But if you ask me which is the easiest, that I can say. Slow and steady wins the race. Just close your eyes, fix the mind on the nosetip and follow the breath. That's all. Do it a number of times during the day, whenever it is possible.

Are the methods of introspection of the unconscious used in modern psychology similar to the techniques used in yoga?

In yoga all the experiences take place within you and through you and the whole process is spontaneous and non-intellectual. It is not necessary to introspect when you practise meditation or kundalini yoga, your karmas automatically manifest in symbolic form. All that is deeply embedded in your personality comes to the surface and thus you are able to behold your own nature. For example, when you practise antar mouna, you introspect the sensory experiences. Gradually you stop all the processes of sensation in total as you travel from the outer to the innermost structures of the mind.

I think the yogic methods of introspection are totally different from those used in modern psychology. The yogic

techniques provide a systematic method in which you are completely independent. You do not have to rely on anybody else, you are the guide and practitioner both.

What is antar mouna?

Antar mouna literally means ‘inner silence’, but in fact the practice of antar mouna is never a silent practice. Sometimes it is a terrible practice, because in the beginning you do not withdraw your mind at all. You give it complete independence. You don’t try to shut out sounds, sensations or experiences, you allow your mind to follow them. It is free to follow the reflections of the past and the anticipations of the future, and all the forms of perception that are taking place.

Then comes a moment when the mind suddenly becomes very still. Perceptions are suspended, sounds are there, but you don’t hear them. There is a disturbance in another room, but you don’t notice it. There may be pain in your legs, but you do not feel it. You did not try to withdraw, but it happened automatically. This is the practice of antar mouna and it is at this point that you introduce your psychic symbol, and then you meditate.

What use does the psychic symbol serve?

In meditation practices a psychic symbol is necessary for maintaining awareness. By concentrating on a symbol one can crystallize the tendencies of the mind at one point. When meditation becomes deep and you are able to visualize an object as if it were real, then the mind has become creative. You are able to create an object by thought. So in *pratyahara* and *dharana*, psychic symbols are for the purpose of crystallization, but in deep meditation they are for materialization.

Kindly explain the process of japa and the correct method of moving the mala?

In the preliminary stages, repetition of mantra is practised audibly and is known as *baikhari japa*. Later you whisper the mantra but no sound is produced. This is called *upanshu japa*. In the third stage, the mouth is closed, the tongue is not

moved and the mantra is repeated mentally. This is termed *manasik japa*. Finally, with each inspiration and expiration you become aware of your natural breath while mentally repeating the mantra. This is known as *ajapa japa*.

The mala is of utmost importance. We use three fingers: the thumb, ring and middle fingers, to move the mala. The other two are not used. A tulsi mala is supposed to be the most powerful medium for japa, and rudraksha is considered the next best. It is important that the mala has 108 beads with a knot in between each bead and a sumeru in the centre.

When you first begin to use the mala, practise baikhari japa, then upanshu and manasik japa. Later, when you go into ajapa japa, with the natural breath, the mala is not necessary. Then the breath becomes the mala.

Whenever I do japa, I have a problem, a conflict with my mala. Throughout the practice I am aware of tension in my right arm. What should I do?

I don't think it is necessary for you to practise with a mala. For a sannyasin there is only one sadhana. Inhale with ujjayi and draw the breath up through the spine, breathe out with *O-o-m-m-m*. You can do this for ten minutes, twenty minutes, one hour, or more. A mala is good for householders because they have so much mental dissipation. The situations of life keep teasing them and if they try to control the mind, they only create tension. So we tell them to use a mala, then they don't have to work with their mind. But for you a mala is not necessary.

What are the different malas and their uses?

As far as I can remember there are more than eighty types of malas prescribed in the tantric books. Of these the most commonly used are tulsi, rudraksha, sandalwood, lotus seed, coral and crystal. Tulsi beads are made from the stems of tulsi plants, which are highly revered in India for their psychic properties. The sensitivity of tulsi makes it one of the best mediums for practising mantra. However, for this reason there are certain restrictions accompanying its use. For example,

if you use a tulsi mala, you should not take alcohol or a non-vegetarian diet.

Rudraksha is the second most commonly used mala. It is not so sensitive to psychic things and there are no restrictions regarding its use. Rudraksha is known to improve blood circulation, functioning of the coronary system and to reduce high blood pressure. So for therapeutic reasons many people choose to wear rudraksha.

Sandalwood is often used for skin problems and the coral mala is also used by those who have eczema, ringworm, scabies, etc., or mental disorders like schizophrenia, neuroses and psychoses. Crystal is used for intensive japa and higher tantric sadhana.

There are different tantric sects and each specifies the use of a particular mala. Worshippers of Vishnu or his reincarnation of Rama or Krishna use tulsi malas, while worshippers of Shiva use rudraksha. Those who worship Devi use crystal malas, or if they are devoted to Saraswati, lotus seeds; Lakshmi, white sandalwood; and Kali, red sandalwood. Those who are devoted to Ganesha also use the red sandalwood mala.

Apart from the traditions of the sects, particular malas are used to create harmony in the levels of psychic, emotional and physical energy and to produce certain effects on the mind and consciousness.

Can you explain ajapa japa?

The practice of ajapa japa is a foundation for kriya yoga, but it can also be considered as an independent practice. The first step of ajapa japa is to concentrate on the natural breath and become aware of the mantra *Soham*. *So* is the sound of inspiration and *ham* is the sound of expiration. After some time you practise a more advanced form of ajapa japa. Between the navel and the throat create an imaginary passage. When you inhale try to feel the breath ascending from the navel to the throat, and when you exhale feel it descending from the throat to the navel. Next, make the breath a little bit

deeper than normal and become aware of the mantra *Soham*. Finally utilize the psychic passageway in the spinal column, which extends from mooladhara to ajna. Make the breath longer by practising ujjayi pranayama and rotate the breath up and down the spinal passage while practising khechari mudra at the same time. Then coordinate the mantra into the practice.

This is a short resume of ajapa japa. After practising it you should concentrate on chidakasha for a few minutes, then try to visualize your psychic symbol there.

Now that I have a personal mantra, should I utilize it for ajapa japa instead of the mantra *Soham*?

In the practice of ajapa japa the mantra *Soham* is used, but once you have your own mantra you can substitute it for *Soham*.

What meditation can be practised alone, at any time?

The easiest practice that one can do alone is concentration on the breath. There are many methods of doing this, but I will only describe a few. You can fix your mind on the nosetip and follow the natural breath as it passes in and out of the nostrils. Feel the breath pass in through the left nostril and out through the right, then in through the right and out through the left. This is mental alternate nostril breathing. Another way is to concentrate on the rise and fall of the abdomen. With inhalation the abdomen expands and with exhalation it contracts.

You can make the breath a little bit deeper and longer than normal and imagine it passing through the psychic passage that extends from the navel to the throat. With inspiration there is ascension of awareness in this passage and on expiration there is awareness of the descending breath. Then with deep breaths you can take your awareness back and forth from the eyebrow centre to ajna chakra at the top of the spinal column. There is also a similar practice in which you imagine the breath passing in and out through

the eyebrow centre. The breath can be imagined travelling to the lungs and expanding the chest and heart on inhalation and evacuating this area on exhalation. Then there are also the various stages of ajapa japa.

All these practices are quite simple, but they are excellent methods of inducing pratyahara. Once there is stability in the brain you should start practising concentration. Try to visualize your psychic symbol either in the mid-eyebrow centre or in the heart centre.

Can you describe the light of chidakasha?

In the beginning when you visualize chidakasha, it is usually very dark. Later on this darkness disappears and you can see light like the dawn of day. Sometimes it is like a brilliant sky during the day or like hazy clouds or dusk. The light in chidakasha is always changing, although for some aspirants chidakasha is illumined right from the start. Actually the experience of bright light is supposed to be the most wonderful.

In chidakasha dharana do the colours have a relationship with the personality?

In the beginning you may visualize black, blue, grey, sometimes yellow, or white. These colours are the *tattvas*, elements, of *prana*, the life force which is constantly flowing throughout the body. This prana is the subtle form of energy and it is composed of five elements, each of a different colour. When you are aware of chidakasha, these five colours come up one after the other. Whether you practise chidakasha dharana in a closed room or out-of-doors, these particular five colours will come up.

Sometimes I experience tiredness in the brain when I do trataka. Why is this?

This is not a very serious thing, it's merely a shortcoming in the practice. You may be overdoing it, the light could be insufficient, or if you're using a candle, the flame may be

flickering too much. Possibly the distance between the object and yourself is not correct, or when you are practising, you are tired and tense. Another reason is that you may have some stomach problem.

What benefits do we get from mouna that we couldn't get from karma yoga?

The practice of *mouna* or silence has its special merits, and likewise karma yoga has its own merits too. If you practise silence for a day or two, your meditation practice will be enhanced because your mind has become more tranquil. But if you practise silence for a few months or years, then the purging of the samskaras takes place at a greater speed than it would through the practice of karma yoga.

By means of karma yoga you can develop self-awareness, and as your awareness increases many hidden things are gradually revealed to you. However, when you practise mouna, awareness develops at a faster speed and karmas are purged at a greater pace. Therefore, we should try to make a synthesis between karma yoga and mouna, so that we can expel the karmas in a systematic way. Then our sadhana becomes more successful.

Can we sing kirtan while practising mouna?

Yes, it is God's name. If you observe mouna for two days and sing kirtan for half an hour, what is the harm? It won't make any difference.

I am a musician trying to compose music which is beautiful and everlasting. How can I attune myself to the Supreme?

The most important thing is that you have to attune your own instrument, which is the mind. And for that there is nothing better than the guru.

If you are a musician by birth, if music is your passion, then you do not really need any other sadhana. Music is nada yoga and a part of the *Samaveda*. Let us call it sangita. Even as yoga is extracted from tantra, sangita is extracted from the

Samaveda. Each and every nada is capable of transforming the elements of chitta. The power of sound can affect the body, the emotions and the mind.

Sit in siddhasana and close your eyes. Take your instrument and play: *sa re ga ma pa dha ni sa, sa ni dha pa ma ga re sa*.

Now equate these notes with mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna, bindu and sahasrara. According to the swara, rotate your awareness from chakra to chakra, up and down sushumna from mooladhara to sahasrara, while practising the sangita. Then practise the scales in different parts. Resonance of the chakra stimulates it into action. The vibrations felt during this exercise stimulate the nerve plexuses and endocrinal glands of the body and calm the nervous system.

Finally, it is said that the musical aspect of nada yoga holds the greatest potential. It is the quickest and easiest way to attain samadhi or self-realization. By the power of music, you can awaken kundalini.

How is meditation on one's own reflection practised?

Meditation on one's own reflection is a form of *trataka*, which is a tantric meditation practice. It is a very quick and powerful method of awakening the psychic personality. Tantrics practise meditation on their own shadow, reflection or photograph. When they concentrate on their shadow, they create the shadow by keeping the sun behind their back. When they meditate on their reflection, they look in a mirror or at their image in clear water and concentrate on their body.

You can concentrate on the reflection of your whole body or on any point, but the most powerful is a red dot between the eyebrows, the centre of the third eye. Concentrate on this point with the eyes open at first and then closed. Experiences are likely to arise, so you must be sure that you can face them. It is most important that you rid yourself of every type of superstition before you start this practice, because if an awakening takes place, you will be overcome by intense fear.

I practise a type of meditation where I lie down and relax, imagining nice natural things. Is this a way towards evolution?

In yoga this is known as antar mouna, which means that you close your eyes and watch the thought process. You don't deliberately bring any thought to your mind, nor do you suppress any thought or feeling. You only witness what comes to your mind voluntarily. A good thought, a bad one, an unhappy memory or a happy one, it doesn't matter what it is, you just watch. That is called witnessing the mind and sense impulses. After this, your thought impulses will gradually minimize and there will come a state of tranquillity. When you experience this state of tranquillity, you must stop this passive type of meditation and start a dynamic meditation utilizing your mantra and psychic symbol.

What do you think about transcendental meditation?

Transcendental meditation is a system of meditation which suits a great range of people. It is perfect for beginners because it brings tranquillity, calms agitated nerves and stills the mind. In western countries particularly, it has helped a great number of people towards the spiritual path, and for many it has been the stepping stone for higher spiritual practices.

There is a technique called 'lying' in which one lies down and observes thoughts coming and going. What do you think about this technique?

This practice is very scientific and for the people of this century it is a great benediction. Our minds are very intellectual and they are permeated by conflicts. Because we have so many thoughts, we tend to suppress them and during direct meditation they rebound on us, influencing the quality of our meditation. In many ways direct meditation can also be the cause of repressions. It is therefore better to be physically relaxed on the ground.

During this practice the mind must be completely impartial, having no conditions or commitments. Whatever

thoughts enter the mind, simply let them come. If worries, passions or fears assail you, it does not matter; you are the seer, not the thinker; the witness and not the judge. When you judge, you analyze thoughts as good or bad. You need not punish yourself. The mind is creating thoughts involuntarily, so let them flow on unobstructed. If there is a void in the mind, then that is alright also.

You can never remove the thoughts by suppression and attempts to do so will only make them more powerful. If you allow the thoughts to manifest and go, they will not come a third time, but if you suppress them, they will return again and again. Therefore, for the rajasic person the best procedure is to lie down quietly. Here I use the word rajasic to mean active, mentally aggressive or ambitious. The mind of a rajasic person is just like a shuttlecock; it is never still.

This practice, however, is not for the tamasic person because he will fall asleep and this won't get him anywhere. The sattwic person will find this practice difficult also, because his mind is as clear as the blue sky. He can experience a thought or image as clearly as you see a full moon on a still night. Therefore, this practice is very good if you are of the rajasic temperament.



10

Tantra

Can you tell us about the origin of tantra?

Tantra is the first discovery of man. It predates vedic literature, but it was not recorded in written form until after the vedic period.

In ancient days, when man was living closer to nature, he moved with the spontaneity of natural behaviour. His concepts about philosophy, God and morality were not the basic philosophy of a society, nation or religion; they were more for his own personal evolution. He began to think about realizing a higher status in life rather than the higher values of a society. You must differentiate between these two. Higher values in life is spirituality. The higher values of a society uphold a civilization and a nation. In our world today there are many countries with higher social standards, but with very low values of life.

This tantric system did not spring from any organized system or planned method. It originated with each individual as a natural urge. To give you a very gross example, hunger is not an organized urge. A man feels hunger individually and tries to satisfy it by any means available. If he is beneath a fruit tree, he will eat fruit; if he is in the forest, he will hunt an animal for his food and so on. In the same way, tantra developed with the individual.

As the evolution of man took place he experienced many peculiar things and he began to wonder how they happened.

For example, if someone dreamed that something was going to happen and it actually did happen, he began to wonder how he could dream of the events to come. So thinking people began to seek the source of their intuitive knowledge, and finally they concluded that there was a higher mind and that mind was not restricted by time and space. Man began to think of his existence, wanting to overcome his mental limitations and to realize that higher spiritual being within. For this purpose he developed certain practices which aroused his personal consciousness, made him more intuitive and increased his awareness.

In many different countries, including India and Mexico, hundreds of practices were developed for the awakening of one particular faculty. People tried various methods of concentration and worship of gods. They tried herbs, minerals, narcotics, alcohol, fermented substances, chanting of mantras, the use of sounds like the drum, bell, conch, and all forms of music and dancing. But it was chaotic without books or a proper system.

It was not until later, after the vedic period, that certain spiritually minded people realized the great potential that lay within the tantric system and wrote it down in book form. Some suggested an austere and puritanical life. Others recommended meditation and spiritual practices, and there were some who suggested the path of devotion and religion. This is how the science of tantra developed in the course of time.

What is the link between the ancient civilizations and the practices of tantra which are being revived today?

A lot will have to be said about it. As far as we know, the Atlantean civilization was well aware of the different forms of tantric practices, symbology and experience. These were already present in the human mind in the Atlantean era, some 45,000 years ago. Every form of knowledge has its symbol in the universal mind. Just as modern computers have a symbolic language, so the human brain possesses archetypes in the form of geometrical shapes which we know as yantras in the

science of tantra. Utilizing these yantras, the Atlantean people were able to organize the knowledge and create a structure of experience which enabled the individual to become aware of the psychic dimension of his personality.

Eventually some crisis must have occurred, compelling the Atlanteans to make a fast exodus. Some of them went as far afield as Latin America, while others went to the European continent, to the Indian subcontinent and to the Far East. I have been through many different countries and I was surprised to see some of the pre-Columbian art pieces in San Agustin, Colombia, and in Lima, Peru. In the open air museums there, the yogic postures, mudras, bandhas and yantras are clearly depicted in stone and terracotta figures.

Unfortunately, in almost every country, the tantric tradition is completely lost today. But the tradition was quietly maintained in India by some very sincere people who had the help of the more conscious and influential of the country. If you read through the most ancient books, the Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas, you will realize that the tantric tradition was the basis of every kind of knowledge in former times.

Nowadays, the basis of this knowledge remains encoded in the language, pictures and diagrams of tantra. Only very recently have scientists been able to discover that the human mind possesses its own archetypes and endless forms, symbols and languages, and that the understanding of language and perception depends on what is already contained in the universal mind.

Global evidence strongly suggests that a prior ancient civilization has already realized, recognized and understood the reality of the universal mind and the individual mind. However, in spite of all the evidence, a universal mind is still just a concept or hypothesis.

What are the differences between Indian tantra and Tibetan tantra?

In the Buddhist period, tantra was divided into two aspects, known as *purusha* or consciousness, and *shakti* or energy,

prakriti. Both consciousness and energy are within us in a united form, but for creation to take place they have to first be realized separately. Now when you separate them, either you follow the prakriti path (shakti) or you follow consciousness (purusha). The Buddhist system preferred to follow the path of purusha tantra, whereas in India they followed the path known as prakriti tantra.

I will explain it in a different way. When you sit for meditation there are two distinct things which come before you. One is the awareness of consciousness and the second is awareness of the experience. Now, what exactly are you going to do? You try to eradicate one of them. If you are meditating on a particular point and any thought or experience comes into your mind, you push it out and try to maintain consciousness. You try to separate consciousness from all experiences, thoughts and feelings, from every point of mental activity. This means that you are following the tantra of purusha.

In prakriti tantra, the practices develop concentration in order to explode the shakti from within. Many thoughts, many experiences and psychic visions will come into your mind and you may actually forget your mantra, *Om*, which is the symbol of purusha. Instead you will follow the experiences. You may see a blue sky, clouds, bright colours or any other symbol. Whatever you see, you follow.

When you concentrate your mind on a symbol and continue to concentrate on it, this is known as the path of purusha tantra. But when you become aware of the effects of that concentration, it is called prakriti tantra. Tibet follows the tantra of purusha, and India the tantra of prakriti.

What are the different kinds of tantra?

In order to develop the higher mind, numerous practices were devised and these practices formed the different paths of tantra. The first path is known as *dakshina marga* or right hand tantra. It is for those who are beginning to live a spiritual life, whether they are renunciates or householders. This path talks of austerity and purity; purity of thought, food, life

and devotion as in Christianity and Hinduism. The path of right hand tantra is a very slow one, which can be compared to travelling by bullock cart.

Of course many people were not satisfied with this path, so they made it more powerful by adding the practices of hatha yoga: asana, pranayama, mudra and bandha. But still they found that this was not a very quick way. The only difference was that it was like travelling by bicycle. So they discovered new ways, including the path of kundalini yoga.

In kundalini yoga they discovered mooladhara chakra and that if you can awaken this chakra, you can easily develop the higher mind. So the next thing they realized was that the sexual act could accomplish this. During the sexual act, two opposite energies are created by the man and the woman, and these energies can cause an explosive awakening in mooladhara chakra.

Then the question arose: "But everybody does it, and their kundalini doesn't awaken?" So they began to think about it. Then came the practices of vajroli mudra and sahajoli mudra. Utilizing vajroli mudra, the shakti could be prevented from passing out. Generally, when orgasm ends a fall takes place, but if the orgasm can be contained or continued, mooladhara awakens and shakti can be directed up into the brain. Now the whole position changed, and people began to practise this new form of tantra in great numbers. This became known as *vama marga* or, left hand tantra.

In kundalini yoga the brain is said to be the centre of higher consciousness, but it is not fully functioning. The brain has different areas and most of them are totally inactive. These inactive zones have special capacities which can be evolved through the tantric practices. Of all the tantric systems, the quickest is the left hand path, but the right hand path is for a beginner. If you have no mental control, then you must follow right hand tantra, but if you are an advanced sadhaka or a yogi and have control over your mind, you can practise left hand tantra.

The use of herbs was also introduced. About five to ten thousand years ago there was a plant, a type of creeper, named

soma. They used to make a beverage or juice from soma and drink it on full moon night. With this they were able to transcend time, space and object. But they soon found that soma was not suitable for all, because many people could not face the transcendental experiences which it brought on. So they began to search for smoother ways as well.

There is a dialogue between Shiva and Parvati. Parvati, as a disciple, approaches Shiva and asks him the way to develop one's innate power. Shiva instructs her that there are not one but thousands of ways. For those people who are not very evolved and who have animal tendencies, there are certain practices. Those who have human tendencies have other types of practices, and those who are sattwic, quiet in nature, have different practices again. So in fact, in the science of tantra there are as many practices as there are human temperaments.

Why is there so much secrecy surrounding the tantric practices?

There is nothing to hide in the tantric tradition, but for over ten centuries we have lived under the subjugation of those who followed different religious and political philosophies. These traditions considered some of the elements of tantra as sinful. Therefore, the attitude of people towards tantra has changed, and so these questions are being asked. People have been converted to such an extent that their philosophical respect for tantra has been shattered and annihilated.

According to dharma, the marital relationship, or the relationship between the two forces of nature, can never be considered sinful. It was considered as a dharma, a samskara. This is made clear in the Vedic Smritis also. If you study the life of the rishis and munis of the past, you will understand that some of the elements considered as sinful by certain traditions are not considered as such in the vedic tradition.

The word 'tantra' is a composition of two words 'tanoti' and 'trayati'. *Tanoti* represents expansion and *trayati* stands for liberation. Therefore, *tantra* means expansion of mind and

liberation of energy. Just as you liberate energy from matter, shakti is liberated from the mind. Here liberation does not denote a religious state; liberation should be understood in the light of modern science. Energy is liberated from matter in the same way as butter is separated from milk. This is tantra.

What is the relationship between yoga and tantra?

Yoga is an offshoot of tantra. The practices of maha mudra, maha bheda mudra, siddhasana, padmasana, pranayama and so on are all from the tantric texts. All the practices of hatha yoga and bhakti yoga were a part of tantra. The system of mantra is considered to be the very definition of tantra, and yantras and mandalas constitute the very life, the very substance of tantra. Kriya yoga is a part of tantra, and kundalini yoga, with its concepts of chakra awakening, ida, pingala and sushumna nadis, also arose from tantra.

Therefore, yoga as we know it today is in fact tantra. But during history people started criticizing tantra because it accepted sexual life. Some religions believed that sexual life was not the divine life, others thought that if you want to rise high, you should abstain from sex. There were some religions which taught that sex was a sin. So when these religions became powerful, they began to oppose tantra. Then the wise people took yoga out of tantra. They abandoned that part that was criticized and adopted that which was acceptable. So yoga is an offshoot of tantra.

How does the path of tantra differ from that of raja yoga?

In raja yoga there is withdrawal from life; in tantra there is acceptance of life. If a person drinks, leads an active sexual life, or eats meat, he can still evolve in the system of tantra. But in certain orthodox systems these things are considered to be unholy, and if you have recourse to them, you will fall spiritually. In tantra, your way of life according to your nature is no barrier to spiritual illumination. Whether you drink or not is never held against you. Whether you are married or

leading the life of a celibate, it is perfectly alright. Tantra will not force you to go against your beliefs.

The main premise in tantra yoga is that spiritual awakening can be had by anyone, under any circumstances, at any level of existence. Man should not oppose or antagonize nature; he should be spontaneous and learn to flow with it. If he opposes nature, he will develop a split personality by creating two patterns of thought.

When travelling in India and Nepal, I was intrigued by the temple art. Can you tell me why they display sexual interaction in such a spectacular manner?

Did you try to think about it? That which is behind the veil should be placed in front. Inhibitions have to be broken so that the mind is exploded, so that there is nothing in the mind that is secret. By creating a social philosophy and social traditions, man hides from himself. This is not absolutely necessary. Man has certain inhibitions and these inhibitions have made him hide things, but the hidden things remain in his mind, unanalyzed, unexpressed and unattended. Eventually they become archetypes, influencing the deeper personality.

One may not even know that this process is happening. These hidden things may influence the body or mind, leading to a cancer or perhaps disturbing the family relationships. They may damage the personality or may inspire creative faculties within the artist.

The statues in the great temples are the creations of artists. These painters and sculptors were very free. They thought about these hidden things and brought them to the public eye through their creations, so that people could see them for thousands of years. I have seen these temples in Nepal, Jagannath Puri, Konark and Khajuraho many times, but they hold no surprise, shame or fascination for me. Once a veil is lifted, the deep archetypes within the mind become known. Then the symbols or forms which express them are understood for what they are without any sense of repulsion or intrigue.

When most people look at these symbols, they see something which they know, but which they don't want to face. An area of consciousness is behind the curtain, and the curtain has to be thrown aside. I can see what I know; I don't see any difference between the temple art and the pictures in a gallery or exhibition. I can see them both equally because for me nothing new is depicted. Why shouldn't these forms be expressed? After all, they represent a necessary aspect of creation.



11

Kundalini

What is the meaning of the word kundalini?

Some people say the word *kundalini* means 'coil', but actually it means 'a deeper place' or 'a pit'. If you make a pit, it is called a *kunda*, and anything that concerns that pit is called kundalini. It is said that in the brain there is a small pit where the central power is lying dormant, waiting to be tapped. Once we can trigger the awakening of that power, the creative centres of the brain, which are presently lying dormant, are brought into activity.

In what way does the awakening of kundalini affect one's life?

With the awakening of kundalini a transformation takes place in life. This has little to do with man's moral, religious or ethical life. It has more to do with the quality of his experiences and perception. With the awakening of kundalini, an inner awakening takes place. Sometimes we use this to extend our life only in relation to society, family, husband, wife, friends, etc., but this doesn't make us appear to be any different than an ordinary person.

In society our brains are structured. There is discipline and control, and we can't be ourselves. Sometimes when awakening of kundalini takes place, the ordinary consciousness is withdrawn and there is no discipline. That is why the talk of such people seems to be utter nonsense to the ordinary person. Christ and Buddha often spoke strangely and offended

society. Mansoor, the Sufi mystic, was skinned alive because he lost all control and could not speak and behave in fear of society. With kundalini arousal one may talk all sorts of nonsense because the lid is completely lifted from the mind. Madness and spiritual awakening are both characterized by a lack of control. The only difference between them is that the spiritually awakened person is guided by a higher consciousness while the mad person is not.

This does not mean that during kundalini awakening you are going to throw off your clothes and run down the street. The awareness changes, but usually it only changes so far as the higher planes are concerned. Of course, the outer life may also be affected, but not always. Perhaps you have known or seen someone who has had an awakening. Their way of thinking, living and philosophizing changes from the way that is regarded as normal.

Why do people say that the awakening of kundalini is dangerous?

Although people believe there are risks involved in the awakening of kundalini, there is no danger. For some time you may just want to sit. You may not want to work, sleep or eat. You may feel thirsty or you may feel nauseated. You may feel restricted or closed in. You may be assailed by passion and all kinds of fleeting disturbances. These experiences may come for some time until you are stabilized. Then you will be able to live like a normal person, but you will know so much more.

Actually, there are far more dangers in normal day-to-day life than you will find on the path of kundalini. Every time you walk across the street, or travel by car or plane, you take a risk. Awakening kundalini is not any more disastrous an experience than a plane crash.

Is there any difference between kundalini yoga and kriya yoga?

Any practice which leads to the awakening of kundalini is a part of kundalini yoga. Therefore, we can say that kriya yoga

is kundalini yoga. There is a powerful source of energy in the body which is said to reside in mooladhara chakra, and this is called kundalini shakti. When this energy is aroused and ascends through the body to the brain, it leads to self-realization. In fact, all yoga practices are aimed at that. This energy can be aroused by kriya yoga, advanced pranayama practices, constant meditation on one point, continual repetition of a mantra and so many other methods. However, kriya yoga is the most scientific way of practising kundalini yoga.

What is the easiest way to awaken kundalini?

I don't know if there is any shortcut method for the awakening of kundalini. Some people have tried LSD, mescaline, bhang, ganja, and long ago, here in India, the sadhus and mahatmas used to take soma. They also practised many different techniques, even visiting burial grounds at midnight to recite mantras. By numerous methods people have been trying to capture the source of shakti, and sometimes they have succeeded. For a few days or months it comes up, but then again it recedes. Then the sadhaka is completely broken and loses all interest in sadhana and becomes hopelessly depressed.

In my opinion the method of awakening kundalini has to be decided according to the individual. In some cases guru alone does the job, in other cases maybe sadhana will do it. Once a mahatma told me that the quickest way to awaken kundalini is to practise vajroli and pancha tattwa. He said that this is the best method, but I know it is also very dangerous. If you fall, you'll never come back.

Swami Sivananda gave the most practical way. He said, "Through kirtan you can awaken kundalini; through pranayama you can awaken kundalini. If you don't like these things, you can do selfless service, *nishkama seva*, and awaken kundalini."

When the mind is purified, when the veil of avidya is rent asunder, the awakening of kundalini can take place either through mantra yoga, kirtan, or purification of the body by

means of karma yoga or pranayama. But how can you do nishkama seva all the time? And you can't do kirtan all day and night. So there must be a synthesis of the paths: karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga and jnana yoga.

Should awakening always begin at mooladhara?

It is not at all necessary to start the awakening from mooladhara; you can have it at any chakra. You can concentrate on anahata chakra and if you are able to handle the awakening there, then the relevant portion in the brain will be illumined. By virtue of evolution every individual has certain chakras which are more sensitive than others. For example, you may be able to awaken your manipura chakra more easily than your ajna chakra. There are some people who have difficulty concentrating on ajna chakra because they feel pain. It does not mean they are unqualified, but the sensitivity is not there.

The system where you first practise awakening of mooladhara and then gradually move up the chakras exists because the experiences related to the higher centres are sometimes very difficult to face. The experiences of the lower centres like mooladhara are not so intense. If you awaken the psychic centres from the lower ones to the higher ones, you can more easily adapt to the psychic experiences.

Is it possible to activate some of the chakras without kundalini awakening?

Yes, the chakras can awaken through the practice of yogic techniques. Sudden awakening and opening of the chakras can also occur on account of unexpected emotional uprisings or during moments of intense fear, anxiety, passion, etc.

The awakening of swadhisthana chakra is very common. In almost every case it has been found that before the awakening of mooladhara, awakening of swadhisthana takes place. Manipura may awaken with the sensations of burning heat. Awakening of anahata and vishuddhi chakras is very rare. It is usually swadhisthana and manipura that are

awakened, because manipura is the centre of all fears and anxieties, and swadhisthana is the centre of all the passions. When these chakras are activated without the awakening of kundalini, it doesn't really matter. You may have dreams related to them, or peculiar experiences which you don't understand the cause of, but this doesn't really affect the mental condition.

Is it possible to have kundalini awakening and not know it?

There are many people who awaken their kundalini and know nothing about it. Some of them may even behave like madmen, and it is only a guru who can understand what has happened. I once met a boy of twelve or thirteen whose family considered him completely mad. They threw him out of the home and he was just wandering about. One evening when I was touring as a mendicant, I made a camp underneath a mango tree.

While I was there he came and sat down right beside me without knowing that I was there. He was completely unaware, shabbily dressed and behaving like a mad boy. After a while I began to feel very strong vibrations from the boy and realized that he had opened some of his higher centres which he was unable to control. He had no command over his experiences at all.

I took him to the river for a bath, and then gradually put him into a kind of hypnotic trance which brought him down to a normal level. Then I sent him off to find a guru who could teach him sadhana right from the beginning and help him gain control over his awakening. Now he is a normal boy.

Can kundalini arise after vasectomy?

Vasectomy does not prevent the rising of kundalini. In fact, in the science of hatha yoga there is a posture known as sidhasana. This asana aims at controlling the sensations in the perineum and also in the lower viscera, so that the stimuli generated within these two centres do not excite the testicles.

Is kundalini present in animals, at least vertebrates?

Animals do have an awakening of kundalini, but the passage is not in the vertebral column. It is below mooladhara. In the science of kundalini there are three stages: lower, middle and higher. In all three stages there are chakras. The kundalini we talk about is in the middle stage, mooladhara being the first and lowest stage for humans and the last in animals, who are in the lower stage. Similarly, above sahasrara there are another six chakras. Therefore, mooladhara is the seventh and sahasrara is the fourteenth chakra.

There are also three planes: instinctive, intellectual and intuitive. Man's energy passes through the intellectual plane, while the energy of the great yogis passes through the intuitive plane and the energy of animals passes through the instinctive plane. The instinctive and intellectual planes are in the body, but the intuitive plane is beyond the body.

So animals can see, hear, walk and feel, but they are not aware of what is happening. A dog is barking, but it does not know it is barking. It has not developed the consciousness of the event in time and space. But at the same time, animals have some wonderful qualities. There are things that a fly, an ant or an Alsatian dog can do which man is unable to do, because animals have an awakening on the instinctive plane.

Once you achieve an opening of the chakras, do the associated faculties remain with you?

After a particular chakra has awakened, it may become dormant again, although sometimes the awakening continues for a long time. For example, if the centre of telepathy opens up, it may be with you for a few weeks only, or it may remain permanently.

Do the chakras emanate any positive or negative attributes?

Awakening of kundalini through the chakras does manifest positive and negative aspects, but these are not inherent in the centres. They are inherent in the personality or the samskaras of the person. In the event of the awakening of kundalini, at

the time of explosion, subconscious and unconscious matter is released. The experience that you have, whether of heaven or hell, positive or negative, has nothing to do with kundalini. It is related to the intrinsic human personality with its background samskaras and karmas. If a man's karmas are sattwic and divine, then the experiences will always be positive. If the karmas are full of confusion, psychological cobwebs and inhibitions, then his experience may be negative.

Therefore, before awakening kundalini one has to develop the sattwic or serene life and try to free oneself from psychological problems through the practice of bhakti yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga and jnana yoga.

Why is it painful when kundalini crosses swadhisthana chakra?

When kundalini crosses swadhisthana, it is not painful. It may be a little frightening because you are transcending areas of your habituated existence, but there is nothing to worry about or fear. Awakening of kundalini in any area is one of the happiest and most momentous events in man's life.

If kundalini awakens suddenly, won't the person become confused if he does not understand what is happening?

Nowadays, if you travel by motor car at very high speed, you do not really feel anything, but if you were to travel by high speed motor car about a hundred years ago when there was no adaptation to speed, you would have felt giddy. You don't feel giddy now because your system has adjusted to the speed principles. In the same manner, when sudden kundalini awakening takes place, you are not used to the experience so you get confused, but if you have been practising hatha yoga, etc., and you experience a slight awakening now and then, you will be better able to cope with it.

Even though people should be careful about awakening kundalini, I believe the awakening of kundalini is a very important, pleasant and historical experience in the life of man. If you can see and experience something more than what you

can generally see and experience through your senses, you are a fortunate man. But at the same time I also know that if you begin to have such experiences, you will be startled and frightened and will wonder what is happening. Therefore, before the actual awakening of kundalini, it is better to experience a mild awakening of the chakra centres.

How is cosmic energy manifested on the earthly plane?

Through the process of kundalini awakening. When an individual's kundalini shakti awakens, the higher centres of his brain and consciousness are activated and he is able to function on the earth plane with a super-mind. This was the experience of all the saints, sages and mahatmas who attained the highest kundalini awakening. It is through them that the supramental energy or consciousness, or the super-mind is always able to operate upon earth with us.

Do LSD and other psychedelic drugs have any effect on the awakening of the chakras?

The use of these drugs results in certain experiences because it brings a state of disconnection or detachment between the motor and sensory cortex. The karmendriyas and jnanendriyas, which normally work in coordination, are separated from one another, resulting in the state of pratyahara or hypnosis rather than an awakening.

Awakening and hypnosis are two different states. In hypnosis there is a process of elimination of consciousness, whereas in awakening there is an expansion of consciousness. If you take any drug – LSD, ganja or hashish, it actually induces a form of hypnosis. All faculties are withdrawn to a point of elimination.

Knowledge, shakti and freedom should be the outcome of awakening. If not, then we can definitely decide that these drugs are not of use. Personal experience of hangovers, dizziness, visions and all kinds of beautiful and horrible experiences are not proof. The proof of awakening must be in the resulting power, whether it is telepathy, clairvoyance

or clairaudience. Your mind should become more powerful, more concrete. If this is the case, then we can accept LSD, ganja or any other drug, but there has been no evidence of anyone who has used these drugs and become as powerful as a siddha. On the other hand, I know sadhus in India who have been continually using ganja for many years and they have lost their brain. You cannot gain spiritual enlightenment from drugs; you can only get a little rest.

Do you gain anything from trying to awaken kundalini if the body has not reached a proper state of purification?

If awakening takes place without proper purification of the body, every now and then you may feel dizzy, indolent, angry, high or low tempered, and so on. Digestive problems may occur. Some people also experience eruptions on the body.

One has to first purify the diet then take to hatha yoga, sincere practice of japa with the help of mantra, experience a little bit of awakening through music, and then go on to the more intense practices for kundalini awakening.

How long does it take to purify the body starting with a vegetarian diet?

With vegetarianism, hatha yoga and pranayama it will take about six months to purify the bodily systems such as the digestive, respiratory, circulatory, muscular and lower nervous systems.

Purification of the brain, however, depends on thinking. When you think, the glands secrete certain hormones which can be very poisonous. Agonies, afflictions, attachments, anger, infatuation, worries, hatred and jealousy all produce harmful secretions in the brain, keeping it continually in a toxic state. These disturbances of the mind take a long time to calm.

What is the actual awakening of kundalini like?

Although different people have different experiences, the most unique and common experience is the release of energy, like an electrical shock in the spinal cord, as though your

spinal cord has been illuminated. You feel electrical current in the bottom of your spine as if it were connected with an electrical power point.

Prior to that you begin to hear a sound which goes on continuously without a break. You don't produce the sound, but it is there. When this sound is experienced, then one should understand that the auspicious moment is drawing near.

There are also related after-experiences. You may hear the sound of a flute or a peacock. You may have momentary experiences, such as the feeling that you are sitting outside in the middle of a monsoon shower. There is also the experience of dark clouds in continual movement, and the sound of thunder. These are some of the common experiences.



12

Kriya Yoga

What is kriya yoga?

In our age of complexities, kriya yoga is one of the most powerful systems for awakening man's spiritual potential, the kundalini. There are many techniques that can be used for this purpose and all have their own place, but the practices of kriya yoga are superior by far; they are more systematic and they are easily accessible for the people of our age. Kriya yoga fulfils the most important need of mankind; to awaken kundalini in a smooth and natural way.

Is kriya yoga Hindu in origin?

Kriya yoga is a very ancient practice which existed long before the present day religions did. There have been some very great civilizations in the past about which we know little. One was the Atlantis civilization and another was the Indus Valley civilization. These two civilizations were responsible for developing the spiritual sciences for the emancipation of man, for the evolution of his spiritual consciousness. They created the system and the kriyas were known to them, but in the course of time, when these civilizations were destroyed, their traditions migrated to different lands. However, they were not kept in proper shape and people from various cultures and religions took different aspects of the kriya practices and taught them in their own way. Sufis taught one thing, the Jewish discipline taught another and Christianity taught another.

Supposing, for example, we are sixty people learning kriya yoga. Later on half of you may become Christian, some will become Hindu, some Muslim and so forth. Now, after about five hundred years the children will ask the same questions: "Is this kriya yoga Christian, Muslim or Hindu?" If I were able to reply I would say, "I taught your ancestors kriya yoga long before they became followers of their religion."

Let us forget the idea that kriya yoga is either oriental or occidental. There is no oriental anger or occidental anger. Anger, greed, passion, jealousy, fear, insecurity, worry, anxiety, hysteria, schizophrenia and insomnia are not eastern or western. How do you get angry? The same way I do. Similarly, *avidya*, ignorance, or *maya*, illusion, is the same in you as it is in me. Of course we have a different colour, not because God made one man black and another white, but because the heat of India made the skin pigment dark, while the cold of Europe made it white.

Kriya yoga existed long before this country was known as India, long before my ancestors migrated here or yours migrated into Europe. Right from the dawn of knowledge, when man first became aware of the fantastic knowledge within him, when he became aware of psychic experiences and began to see with his eyes closed, he started pondering over this heightened awareness and finding ways to develop it. One of these ways is kriya yoga.

Is kriya yoga only mentioned in the tantric scriptures?

I don't know if everybody will accept it, but the practices of kriya yoga have been hinted at in the Bible. In Genesis there is a passage which talks about Jacob's dream. He saw a ladder which reached from the earth to heaven and there were angels ascending and descending on it. I think that a ladder is also mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament and it says that you must climb half way up the ladder with the eyes open and the rest of the way with the eyes closed.

When we practise kriya yoga, we do quite a few kriyas with the eyes open and then we practise the rest with the eyes closed.

The ladder is sushumna nadi. Its lower end rests in mooladhara chakra, which, according to tantra, is the earth element, and the top of the ladder reaches heaven, sahasrara. The angels ascending and descending the ladder represent the movement of the breath through sushumna. So this is a very striking similarity between the instructions hinted at in the Bible and the practices detailed in the various tantric scriptures.

Why is it that in some of the kriya yoga practices the eyes are kept open and in others they are closed?

In the beginning, if you keep your eyes closed, you will become aware of most of your mental problems and worries. When the eyes are closed, the brain is quieter and the subconscious forces are able to come into operation. When you keep your eyes open, however, the brain is functioning more and the unconscious conflicts stay out of the consciousness.

Secondly, in kriya yoga the emphasis is not on concentration but on the practice. If you consciously keep your eyes open for a period of half an hour, pratyahara will become automatic and easy. For example, if you practise a mantra with the eyes closed and then with the eyes open, you will find that the state of pratyahara is much better with the eyes open than closed. In pratyahara there is a temporary disconnection between the nervous system and the brain which can be best achieved by keeping the eyes open. Remember, I am talking about *pratyahara*, dissociation, and not *dharana*, concentration. Dharana has to be done with the eyes closed. Therefore, in kriya yoga the first practices, which develop pratyahara, are performed with the eyes open, but after tadan kriya, dharana begins and at that point you are asked to keep your eyes closed.

Is a guru necessary for those who are practising kriya yoga?

You may read the kriya techniques in a book, but if you want to learn them, you must go to a guru for personal instruc-

tion. A practitioner needs someone who can guide him and explain things that are not clear to him. This is necessary until the aspirant has evolved enough to establish contact with his inner guru. Then the outer guru is no longer so important.

What is the difference between your kriya yoga and Swami Yogananda's system?

Actually, the kriya yoga techniques that I teach and those that were taught by Swami Yogananda are taken from tantra. When Swami Yogananda was living, tantra was feared by many people. So when he was in America, he had to teach only what the people could accept and assimilate at that time. They could not assimilate padmasana, so how to teach them sirshasana and padmasana? They could not practise ujjayi properly, so he had to make many amendments.

Swami Yogananda had to work with people who were not prepared, so he tried to simplify the kriya practices so the people could manage them. In our system of kriya yoga we have not simplified the techniques because there are many people who have undergone yogic preparation. They have perfected asanas, pranayama, mudras and bandhas and have been living on a simple vegetarian diet. So the difference between the systems is because we are confronting a different group of students.

In Swami Muktananda's ashrams I've observed people making uncontrolled movements and strange noises during their meditation. They call these kriyas. What's the difference between what we call kriyas and their kriyas?

In Sanskrit, *kriya* means action, manifestation or practice. Kriya is derived from the root *kri*, meaning 'to do' or 'to act'. So kriya can mean anything. In hatha yoga, neti, dhauti, kunjai, etc., are all kriyas. They are the *shatkriyas*, six systems of purification. When somebody practises shaktipat on you, you start doing all kinds of mudras and physical postures. They are also kriyas because your body is acting. What you

are practising here are not kriyas, but kriya yoga. You must understand the difference.

How can I learn kriya yoga?

You must first become proficient in the practice of asanas, pranayama, mudras and bandhas. Then you will be able to learn kriya yoga in no time. The practices of kriya yoga are not very difficult. In my opinion, dhyana yoga is far more difficult to practise than kriya yoga. Dhyana means sitting in an asana, trying to draw the mind to a certain level and then entering into a different state. Very few people can accomplish this easily. But in kriya yoga you don't close your eyes, you don't maintain a steady posture all throughout, nor are you asked to concentrate the mind on one object. The mind is allowed to remain free and to do what it likes.

These are the basic features of kriya yoga. There are twenty major kriyas which can be learned without difficulty. They are arranged in a special order to systematically induce pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. There are no social or age restrictions for kriya yoga. However, you should be able to practise pranayama so that it does not produce heat in the body.

Just as salt is the basic spice in food, likewise pranayama is the basic practice in kriya yoga. When pranayama is practised for a long time for fifteen to thirty minutes every day, it creates heat in the system which can cause constipation and drying up of mucus in the lungs. Kidney metabolism also slows down. It is very important to remember that while doing pranayama the body should not perspire or shake. First make yourself proficient in pranayama before you take to the practice of kriya yoga, then you will easily master the practices and gain the optimum benefits.

How long will it take me to prepare for kriya yoga?

If you have been practising pranayama for a long time, then it will hardly take three to six months to prepare for kriya yoga. But if you have not been practising pranayama, it may take up to two to three years.

I can teach you pranayama in three days, but it is not knowing pranayama that is necessary for kriya yoga. Pranayama must be perfected and the body must be gradually accustomed to its effects. Therefore, those people who have not been practising pranayama will need longer to prepare. However, in any case one can be ready for kriya yoga within six months to three years.

What happens if you start practising kriya yoga without having prepared with asanas and other practices?

If you are practising correctly, an awakening may take place. But if you haven't trained your nervous system, if you haven't mastered kumbhaka or even prepared your mind to have experiences of a different dimension, then you probably won't be able to manage it. Many people start practising maha mudra and maha bheda mudra before they are prepared and they have fantastic experiences, but they cannot understand them. They say, "Hey! Something is happening to me, I feel very hungry these days", or "I don't feel hungry at all," or "I have many frightening dreams," or "I feel that someone is in my room." These experiences only occur when you have not prepared yourself systematically.

Can women practise kriya yoga during menstruation?

During the monthly periods of ladies, kriya yoga is definitely helpful, especially the practices of maha mudra and maha bheda mudra. They help to overcome depression which is natural during the monthly period, and they help to maintain emotional balance which is often lacking at this time.

What is the effect and purpose of running the breath up and down the spinal column in the practices of kriya yoga?

When you breathe it is a physical action, but when you think that you are breathing, it is also a psychic or mental action. When you practise ujjayi pranayama with the breath flowing up and down the psychic passage of sushumna, you are centralizing

the mental force in that particular area and this can create a type of awakening. By practising pranayama you are purifying the nervous system, and when you practise mental pranayama, that purifies the mind, the thinking process and the different areas of your consciousness.

In the kriya yoga practices are the frontal and spinal pathways, arohan and awarohan, actual passages or are they just created mentally?

The process of ascending, *arohan*, and descending, *awarohan*, pertains to the awakening of prana shakti. There is no path in the body which does not become a passage for prana, but in kriya yoga the process is from mooladhara up to bindu through the frontal passage and from bindu down to mooladhara through the spinal passage.

The purpose of creating these passages is to develop concentrated and intensified self-awareness. Awareness or consciousness is usually dissipated and this dissipation is responsible for wastage of energy. If you have an electrical installation and connect a hundred tape recorders to it, the current will not be sufficient, but for one or two recorders the current would be ample. In the same way, the prana shakti which is distributed all over the body, the mental field and even the psychic field should be led through one channel in a concentrated form. Therefore, by the practice of arohan and awarohan you are creating an energizing flow of consciousness.

Don't we sometimes practise descending in the frontal passage too, as in breath awareness between manipura and vishuddhi?

When we are doing the preparatory practices of kriya yoga, sometimes we move the breath up and down between the navel and throat. This is a preliminary practice in moving the consciousness. It is easy to start with this passage and later on we just stretch it down to mooladhara chakra and up to bindu. The passage between vishuddhi and manipura is a very sensitive one and even though you don't have very fine

concentration, you can imagine the stream flowing between these two poles. That is why it is supposed to be the best preliminary practice.

Must we practise all the kriyas we have learned or just a few?

The kriya yoga practices require a minimum of thirty minutes a day. There is a definite sequence of practices, but if you are short of time, certain kriyas can be omitted. However, this can be done only after some competence has been achieved. There are certain kriyas which are very important and they should be practised every day regardless of time.

The very first practice of kriya yoga is vipareeta karani mudra, which is of vital importance. The second is chakra anusandhana in which you develop awareness of the chakras and their contact centres. This practice can be omitted completely after some time because it is basically a preparation to familiarize you with the ascending and descending passages. The third practice is nada sanchalana, Om chanting. It is an important one, but after some time you can minimize it from thirteen rounds to three. The next practice is pawan sanchalana in which you inhale with ascending consciousness and exhale with descending consciousness. Then comes shabda sanchalana with *Soham* on ascending and descending. These two practices can be combined and the number of rounds minimized to about twenty-one times once you have achieved considerable tranquillity. The next practices are maha mudra and maha bheda mudra. They should be practised in the same number as they are taught. In this way some of the practices can be omitted, some can be minimized while others must be continued as they were taught.

Maha mudra and maha bheda mudra are the actual life of kriya yoga. If for any reason you are not able to practise the whole sequence of kriyas, continue maha mudra and maha bheda mudra without fail. You should also continue to practise the full number of rounds of vipareeta karani mudra. Of course, one must use commonsense. If the body

is weak or sick, the practices should be discontinued for some time.

Why are the kriya yoga practices performed a specific number of times, e.g. 9, 13, 49, 59?

I personally feel that the numbers 9, 13, 49 and 59 are intended for the aspirant to adjust to the practices. However, I have adopted a system by which fewer rounds can be done. Many years ago, when I was practising kriya yoga, my sadhana time was limited, so it was necessary to shorten the number of rounds in order to complete the practices. If you do the traditional number of rounds, the practice becomes very long. In this hectic life, when you barely have half an hour or fifteen minutes free, what are you going to do? If you have plenty of time, you can do all the rounds, otherwise shorten them.

Once we have learned kriya yoga, should we continue practising asanas, pranayama, etc?

Kriya yoga is the ultimate practice in tantra. Once you start practising it, you don't have to continue with asanas, pranayama and so on. You have to make classifications in the practice of yoga. First you go to primary school to learn the alphabet and small words and sentences and then go on to geography, history, mathematics, etc. If you continue your education at university, you may study science or medicine. But are you still going to read the books you read in primary school and study everything you have already learned? No, every act of learning is a preparation for the future. So it is not wise to practise all forms of yoga. You have to arrange all the systems of yoga into grades and gradually transcend them all.

Please explain the kriya yoga eye exercises.

Gazing at the tip of the nose is called *nasikagra drishti*. Gazing at the eyebrow centre is called *shambhavi mudra* or *bhrumadhya drishti*. When you sit quietly, fixing your gaze on the tip of the nose, it immediately works on mooladhara chakra because

mooladhara and the nose are connected. With the awakening of this chakra you become aware of the arohan passage. When you fix your gaze on the eyebrow centre, it affects ajna chakra, the psychic centre. In maha mudra you practise shambhavi mudra and in maha bheda mudra you practise nasikagra drishti.

Why do I get a headache when I practise these exercises?

If you practise them slowly and gradually, you won't have a headache. First of all you must practise trataka. This is externally gazing at one point, for example, an unflickering candle flame. Once you are well established in trataka, you should begin to practise nasikagra drishti.

Through kriya yoga, will our past and future be revealed to us?

Kriya yoga evolves the force in an individual and accelerates his evolution. Now it depends on an individual what he's going to do with that. Either you are going to invest that force into a creative energy or you are going to invest it into psychic energy.

As past, present and future are divisions of time created by your personality and your vision, knowledge of past and future is not a very difficult thing. Actually, there is no past, no present or future. Time is one part of infinity. As much as you can see is present, and what you can't perceive is either past or future. Once you break the barriers of the mind, everything becomes clearly visible.

For one intent on personal evolution, knowledge of the past and future has no charm, but to an ordinary person who hasn't developed knowledge of the past, present and future it seems intriguing. Those who are spiritually developed care little about what was in the past or what is in the future. Knowledge of the past and future is not a very great achievement; it is just one incident, just one system of monitoring. As such, as you progress in the practice of yoga you will lose the interest which you are showing now.

I practised kriya yoga for two months and then stopped because I began to have so many worldly desires and I could no longer concentrate. I don't think I am ready for the practices.

Being a part of tantra, kriya yoga is not against the fulfilment of worldly desires. The practices of kriya yoga are not only for renunciates; they are for the ordinary person who lives a normal life. If you have worldly desires, it's perfectly alright, you can still practise kriya yoga.

Why did your worldly desires spring up? You must have been suppressing them. When there is no soda water, the gas doesn't come up. If you have been suppressing your mind and now worldly thoughts are coming up, it's a very good thing. Supposing you were constipated for three days and now you are going to the toilet many times. Ah, it's so good! Kriya yoga has done the job, it has removed your mental constipation.

You talk about not being able to concentrate. Time and time again I have been telling people that kriya yoga is not a practice of concentration. Concentration is raja yoga and kriya yoga is a practice of tantra. It is for those people who can't live without good food, without their children, men or women, nice clothes, comfortable homes and all those things. I think you must have been practising kriya yoga, in the spirit of raja yoga. While you are practising kriya yoga, you can continue to have all the things you want. You see, in tantra the purpose is to jump over the mind without the knowledge of the mind.

In tantra the mind should be kept under control, but you don't have to become very serious like the people who put on a 'Sunday face' before they enter the church. There's no need to be solemn; God is full of bliss. In India, when we go to the temples we dance, because a temple is a place where we can be happy. In the family there are problems; a wife is a problem, a husband is a problem, a child is a problem, money is a problem, but in the temple there is no problem. I can dance and sing there.

So, in your practice of kriya yoga don't become too rigid and serious. You don't have to renounce anything and you have no need to suppress your mind.

How fragile is the state of mind brought about by the practices of kriya? If we lead a city lifestyle and succumb to a few wild parties, will this be harmful?

There are three distinct paths: yoga, jnana and tantra. The tantric path is for people who live in the world and follow the 'wild' type of life. Kriya yoga will give you a higher interpretation of sensual life and worldly relationships. Perhaps tantra is the only path in life where everything is accepted and nothing is rejected.

There are a number of people in Australia who have become mentally unstable through the practices of kriya yoga. Why is this and how can it be avoided?

It is not possible for me to believe that anyone can become unstable by the practices of kriya yoga, because this is an age-old practice, duly tested by time and history and many great people. What happens is that when some people practise kriya yoga, or any other yoga for that matter, they are not able to adjust the practices according to their capacity. At the same time, when people are practising kriya yoga and awakening is due to take place, they are exposed to certain events in life which make their minds unstable.

To make it clearer, when awakening takes place, the delicate situations that occur in your life become very keen and more effective in your mind. As the consciousness is purified you become like radar and not only the sensitive events of life, but even the sensitive areas within the mind are also affected by kriya yoga. As such, although I am not against family life, marriage, different dietary habits, etc., during these periods of extreme sensitivity, it is very important that the practitioner maintains certain disciplines regarding the affairs of his life.

Now, there is another point I want to make very clear. The whole culture in the West is based on the idea of guilt. This idea

has become so prominent in man's life today that psychologists are stating that guilt is at the root of all mental and physical sicknesses. When you practise kriya yoga, this guilt comes out and it is really very painful. If you think you are committing sins every day, what are these thoughts going to do to your mind? If you think what you are doing is bad, don't do it. Finish it off. But if you can't, you have to accept and face it.

Have you seen what happens to people who are bent on the idea of guilt and sin? At a certain point of evolution they see the ghost in front of them and this creates a disturbance. It creates very difficult ripples in their mind and they begin to suffer from remorse and more guilt. So that is another reason why people become unstable. There are so many possible causes, but not kriya yoga, please.

Lastly, kriya yoga should only be practised in small doses. If you are cooking two kilos of vegetables, how much salt do you put with them? Two kilos or just a pinch? The whole of life is a scheme, and your activities from morning to night are also part of the scheme. You have to add yoga to that, you can't just abandon everything else and practise kriya yoga all day. There should be a balance between raja yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga. If you just practise for half an hour to forty-five minutes in the morning, or even less than that, without tension or discomfort, kriya yoga will only give you peace, harmony and balance. Surely if you drink five kilos of milk and eat seven kilos of cheese and seventy or eighty bananas, that's an overdose. So some people may have taken an overdose of kriya yoga and this led them to instability.

Should the serious practitioner of kriya yoga practise celibacy or lead a normal sexual life?

Kriya yoga is not particularly concerned either with celibacy or normal sexual life. Throughout the world celibacy has been misinterpreted and taught incorrectly. Most people think that abstention from sexual life is celibacy or *brahmacharya*, but it is not. The yogic concept of brahmacharya is the control of the sexual hormones, not of the semen.

In yoga there are two words – *veerya*, which stands for semen, and *retas*, which refers to the sexual hormones issuing from the pituitary body. People have been thinking that to control the semen is celibacy, but in yoga the concept is totally different. You have to practise yoga in such a way that the very foundation, the very source of sexual energy is controlled at the sahasrara chakra, in the pituitary body. This is definitely not possible simply by abstaining from sexual intercourse. However, once this control is established you can even control the hormones in the pituitary body while you are indulging in sexual activity.

Therefore, in kriya yoga the first technique one practises is vipareeta karani mudra. By means of this technique one learns to maintain complete control over the pituitary body, that is, sahasrara chakra. Once you are able to establish control over the particular centre from which the hormones flow, and ultimately become responsible for the production of semen in the body, then you have obtained brahmacharya, even though you've been having sexual intercourse.



13

Tantra and Married Life

Can I accelerate my evolution while living an active family life?

In tantra they talk about acceptance, about living life fully as it should be lived, without negating or rejecting anything. If a person is destined or determined to reach the highest point of life, whatever he does is a part of yoga. A person who does not want to discover the essence of soul, to experience self-realization or to know the truth does not progress, even if he goes to the temple or church regularly and lives an ethical and moral life. It is the purpose or aim of life which is important. If I go from here to Rome, the road I take, what I eat or who I talk to on the way matters little, as long as my aim is to go there. The old scriptures talk about the background and birth of some of the great rishis. What made them great? It was not the moral, ethical or social situation in which they were born, but the purpose for which they lived.

One must have an aim, a way, and the courage to follow it consistently. Then you can evolve wherever you are, whether in an ashram or with your family.

Isn't marriage just a social institution?

It is because we have forgotten the spiritual purpose of this union that the relationship between man and woman has become socialized into the marital roles of husband and wife.

In yoga and in tantra, man and woman are brought together for the fulfilment of something very great.

In the creation of nature, man and woman are complementary to each other's spiritual evolution. Anything that transpires between them is a necessary corollary to spiritual life. The process of coming together, living together, working together, sexually interacting together and meditating together is so important for the evolution of the human life. Therefore, the sooner you replace the terms 'husband' and 'wife' the better because these words merely represent a legal situation. You may continue to use them if you like, but the spiritual situation is far more important.

Where does a man stand in relation to a woman? The relationship is purely spiritual; it is not for progeny or pleasure alone. Progeny are the by-products of an accident, and you can avoid that accident if you like. Pleasure is a very limited aspect of their coming together. The awakening of kundalini and the higher vision which results from this awakening is the ultimate purpose for man and woman coming together, living, working and striving together. You use the word 'couple'. The exact translation for this in Sanskrit is *maithuna*. When two are together, it is called *mithuna*. The word *maithuna* has been derived from the word *mithuna*.

Often jealousy of yoga arises in the case of married couples when one partner practises and the other does not. What is the most practical solution to this problem?

In order to realize the vision of yoga, one does not have to step out of the threshold of married life. If the two partners are not able to understand each other, there is still a way. In the path of tantra, the husband and wife are considered as Shiva and Shakti. Therefore, keeping this relationship in view, the two partners can definitely continue their spiritual life while living at home.

In our modern culture there is a peculiar tendency. If the husband is yoga-minded, he wants his wife to also be yoga-minded, and vice versa. But if one of them practises and the

other one is not able to participate, then they have problems. In family life, the relationship between the two partners is paramount. If it is not possible for the wife to convince her husband in terms of hatha yoga or raja yoga, then it is much better that she finds another way of practising yoga with him. It is mainly for this purpose that the science of tantra was founded.

Tantra is not new or difficult. Ultimately you will find it is a part of your culture. It is only tantra that accepts all aspects of life as a part of your great pilgrimage. Tantra alone sees a spiritual purpose and a great meaning in all these things. Therefore, it is very suitable for people of the modern age. You have been living the life of a tantric without knowing it. You just have to realize it, accept it, and perhaps give a little bit of cutting, pruning and modifying. You don't have to destroy the present structure of your life, you can construct your spiritual life around it.

Can meditation help one achieve sexual fulfilment?

Meditation brings about a superior experience, which is undying. The experience of sexual interaction is very momentary; one can't even recall it after some time. But when you have the experience in meditation and it continues, the bliss is greater and the pleasure is very deep-rooted in the mind. Then one does not need to have that momentary sensual experience which is nothing but nervous titillation.

As the experience gained by meditation is of a superior quality and the sexual experience is of a temporary nature, this is not a question of sexual fulfilment but of total fulfilment. The momentary pleasure ends in pain, disappointment and depression, but the bliss of meditation is continual. It is known as *ananda*, and that is why swamis have 'ananda' as part of their name. *Ananda* means undying felicity that is attained through meditation.

How can I carry out my family duties with detachment?

The answer lies in the path of tantra, which accepts man's most natural urge, the sexual action, as a way to spiritual

illumination. In tantra, the two partners are known as Shiva and Shakti. *Shiva* means consciousness, or *purusha*; *Shakti* means energy, or *prakriti*. In the scheme of creation, Shakti is the main executive; Shiva is detached. He is a silent witness to the whole game of creation. In the same manner, in the interaction between Shiva and Shakti, it is much wiser and more scientific that Shakti becomes the active participant. Then Shiva remains a silent witness and spectator of the whole game. If Shiva becomes active in this game, then he is the loser, and likewise, if Shakti is suppressed and becomes passive, then both are at a loss. Therefore, in maithuna, Shakti is the active partner and Shiva is the passive partner.

In the path of progeny, man, the male partner, is the active participant, and the woman is only the tool. In the path of pleasure, Shiva is the enjoyer and Shakti is the tool. In both of these, Shakti takes the inferior position and Shiva becomes superior. However, this is an unnatural way because the whole creation is a miracle of Shakti, not of Shiva. Shiva never participates in creation. Shakti holds the superior position in the scheme of creation. Similarly, in the path of tantra, Shakti should hold the superior position and Shiva should only participate. That is the natural way. If this tantra is properly practised, family life will improve, man and woman will become closer and the rate of separation will come down. Also, frustration and disappointment will be greatly reduced and the erratic sexual hunger will be pacified.

What are the tantric practices for married couples?

Vajroli and sahajoli are practised by householders to improve and spiritualize the marital relationship. Vajroli is the practice for males which gives control over vajra nadi, the nerve centre responsible for sexual passion. Vajra nadi is the conductor of semen. It is comprised of two nerves which pass from the genital organ down both sides of the groin into the testicles, where they stimulate production of testosterone. Testosterone maintains male sexual function and also stimulates the heart.

So, by controlling the vajra nadi, you can control the semen and the heart also.

Vajroli is practised in padmasana or siddhasana. While retaining the breath in jalandhara bandha, you contract the genital area, including the testicles, genital organ and vajra nadi. During this practice the bladder and kidneys are also contracted.

When ejaculation takes place during the normal sexual act, the vajra nadi is filled with blood and vajroli mudra takes place spontaneously, just for a few moments, even if you are not aware of it. But those who have mastered vajroli can control the ejaculation so that it only occurs when they choose, or does not occur at all.

After ejaculation there is a drop in the energy level and depression in the nervous system, but if there is no ejaculation, the energy level remains high, nervous depression does not occur, the blood pressure level remains steady and heat is generated in the brain. At the same time, you will be free from the sense of loss, depression, frustration and guilt. Sexual life is not a cause of weakness. If practised correctly, it brings about a great awakening of energy.

In the tantric process, the experience of energy explosion at the sexual peak has to be controlled. As long as the experience continues, you can direct it to the higher centres. In vajroli the experience takes place in the brain, not in the lower organs. The purpose of vajroli is to maintain this experience for as long as possible without ejaculation. If you can do this, heat is generated in the brain and at the peak of sexual interaction, sushumna comes into operation and kundalini is awakened.

Sahajoli is the parallel practice for females. Sahajoli is performed in siddha yoni asana. While retaining the breath, the vaginal muscles and urethra are contracted and drawn up. The contraction is the same as when you are trying to hold back from urinating. The uterus, bladder and kidneys are also contracted.

It is most important for those who utilize these practices to maintain the correct attitude towards them. In yoga, sexual

life is not practised for any other purpose except samadhi. If that purpose is kept in mind, then samadhi becomes the goal, sexual life the act, and yoga the technique.

Are any preparatory practices necessary?

In my opinion, vajroli and sahajoli should not be practised directly. First you must master kumbhaka, uddiyana bandha and siddhasana. A few asanas like vajrasana, supta vajrasana, shalabhasana and paschimottanasana should also be practised because they place an automatic contraction on the genital region. When you practise paschimottanasana and hold it for several minutes, you prepare the body for uddiyana. In siddhasana you press the perineum with the heel so that a slight contraction of mooladhara and vajra nadi takes place automatically. Sirshasana is most important because it circulates the blood in the brain.

Please remember that all these practices take time to perfect. You cannot expect results for several years.

How can we overcome feelings of guilt?

You cannot get rid of guilt just through self-analysis. Unless your mind has undergone a change, freedom from guilt is not possible. Guilt is at the root of most human beings. Our behaviour, relationships and ambitions are guided by the sense of guilt in us. Just because you practise yoga does not mean you will become free from guilt. When you come to yoga, you still have the notion of good and bad, pure and impure. Those who come to yoga with a free mind, without any notion of duality, of good and evil, perhaps they may be able to eliminate this guilt.

What are the spiritual repercussions of abortion?

I don't think there are any because life is dying every minute. Sometimes when a man and woman unite, the sperm and ovum meet, but they die immediately. Is it not an abortion? It is an instantaneous abortion, but no one is aware of it.

Life comes after four months. Before that, the embryo is just a tumour in the womb. If a tumour is removed, an operation is performed on a living cell in a living body, but that is not equivalent to killing. Abortion before four months, when the individual life does not yet exist, is definitely not anti-spiritual and it does not block spiritual progress.

Is it necessary to retire from householder life in order to advance spiritually? If not, how can we best use our life to move in this direction?

In theory, it is not at all necessary to retire from householder life in order to realize higher consciousness. The life of a householder should be an ideal place to learn, to develop your awareness and to practise sadhana. But in practice we have found that the life of a modern householder has become so unnatural and artificial, and so complex that the householder finds it very difficult to continue his spiritual life. It is for this reason that many people are refusing to enter household life.

In the ancient books of India, this question has been discussed a lot. Who is better able to realize himself? A householder or someone who has retired from household life? The answer they settled on was that the life of a householder is the life of a karma yogi; it is one of selfless service where one can learn tolerance and develop other positive qualities. But if this is to be the case, a householder must understand that his life is not just for sensual enjoyment and it should not be squandered away.

If, when you enter householder life, you are clear about the purpose, then there is nothing to be said against the life of a householder. If I ask you why you entered householder life, you may say that you became a householder in order to practise spiritual life with your partner, to exhaust your karmas together, to raise virtuous and spiritually minded children and to give these beautiful souls to society in order to build a great society. But is that the objective of every householder? Surely not. Most householders do not think at all. They live

in complete ignorance. This is precisely the reason why many spiritually minded people escape householder life. They want to follow a path which represents the ultimate purpose of human life.

Every thinking person can understand that food, sleep, insecurity and the sexual urge are drives which are common to both humans and animals. If we participate in the same exploits, then how do we differ from animals? The fundamental difference is that the human being is not content in just satisfying his basic urges; he is conscious of a higher state of awareness and is trying to discover and develop that. Such people do not find householder life and society very congenial, so they get out.

When I was eighteen, I found that I had to choose my path. My parents were very spiritual and they were helping me, but my relatives would always ask, "When are you going to get married? You are eighteen now, I will find you a suitable wife." Then one of my relatives died. That was my first and last experience of a death in the family. Everybody was full of sorrow and mourning and I did not know what to do because I couldn't cry. There was nothing to eat in the house because people don't prepare food when someone dies in the family. So I took some money and went and had a little food. I couldn't understand why I should not eat.

Whenever I was reading a book, some relative would ask, "What are you reading? Swami Vivekananda?" or, "Oh, you are reading the Bible! Are you going to become a Christian?" If they saw me looking at the Koran, they would say, "Hey, are you going to become a Muslim?" I soon realized that I did not belong with these people. I could not manage all those religious, monetary and marital things. So I decided I would not stay with those idiots anymore.

I told my father and he was very happy with my decision because he too had had the same problem. One day he told me, "Listen, after my marriage I realized that I was meant for spiritual life. I had a very eminent guru, but still I could not devote my life to higher spiritual efforts. Now I wish that you

would fulfil this desire for me. If you don't want to become a householder, that's perfectly alright."

Now, I believe that if householder life is to be made fit for higher realization, then it has to be restructured and re-organized. There is no use saying that every householder can realize God. The life of a householder is very dissipated; it's a complete mess, whether in the Christian, Muslim, Hindu or western society. The children are not taught the real aim of life and the elders are completely ignorant of it. This is the reason why so many people are stepping out.

According to tradition, how does the yogi combine family life with spiritual life?

I can give you some examples in history of yogis who have combined both these aspects and of others who have renounced. Lord Krishna, who is supposed to be the Lord of Yoga, was married, not only once, but eight times. Rama, the great disciplinarian, was also married and had children. Lord Shiva, who presides over the yogic consciousness in the East and West today, was married. Tantra itself is the offshoot of Lord Shiva's true story. There have been many great yogis who led a complete married life. In India today, many householders live with a wife and children and follow the life of a yogi in their own homes. But there are also many examples of people like Lord Buddha, who renounced his wife, family and kingdom to become a yogi, and Shankaracharya, who became a sannyasin at the age of seven and never married.

From the lives of yogis in the past and those who are living in the present, we can conclude that sexual life, or a life of sexual abstention, should be decided only by an overwhelming desire for an experience of higher consciousness. Otherwise it is no use talking about either abstaining or indulging. If you indulge in sex like an ordinary person, then there will be no difference between you and him in relation to spiritual progress. And if you refrain, it is like pulling the tail of an elephant.

You need a great passion to divert your mind from the lesser one. For example, suppose you are fighting in a frantic battle, with guns and cannons shooting forth. In the midst of the fray, you meet a lady. Will you take an interest in her, or will you ignore her and go on fighting? At this historic and overwhelming moment when the passions are high in battle, you are not going to take an interest in anything except the fight. Likewise, there must come a time in your life when you experience passions higher than sex. Only then should you try to abstain. Meanwhile, finish it off, transcend it, and then become a good swami.

Without a great passion, how can you hope to transcend this lower passion? Until you have realized and discovered this great energy or passion within you and within everyone, don't talk about it; it is better to lead a normal married life.

What if you have higher passion, but you still have an animal body?

If you have higher passions, you will never think about the body. It is like a man who is occupied with a great mission. He may take some rice, bread or chapati, but he doesn't even think about it. He is not aware of what clothes he puts on in the morning or where he sleeps at night. A man with a mission or a higher passion is not at all aware of the lower fulfilments. It is only this man who can think about abstention. All other yoga practitioners should lead a life according to the laws of nature, without resistance. If you have to live in a river, don't create enmity with the crocodile.

14

Left-Hand Tantra

What is left-hand tantra?

Tantra has many branches and one of them is *vama marga*, the left-hand path of tantra. In Sanskrit, *marga* means 'path' or 'way' and *vama* means 'woman' and also 'left'. According to tantra, the woman always sits on the man's left and so she is called vama. Therefore, vama marga means the path of tantra with women.

The contention of vama marga is that the awakening of kundalini is possible through the interaction between man and woman. The concept behind this follows the same lines as the process of fission and fusion described in modern physics.

Man and woman represent positive and negative energy. On a mental level they represent time and space. Ordinarily, these two forces stand at opposite poles. However, during sexual interaction, they move out of their position of polarity, towards the centre. When they come together at the nucleus or central point, an explosion occurs and matter becomes manifest. This is the basic theme of tantric initiation.

The natural event that takes place between a man and a woman is considered as the explosion of the energy centre. In every speck of life, it is the union between the positive and negative poles that is responsible for creation. At the same time, union between positive and negative poles is also responsible for enlightenment, and the experience which

takes place at the time of union is a glimpse of the higher experience.

This subject has been thoroughly discussed in all the old scriptures of tantra. Actually, the energy waves that are created during the mutual union are not as important as the process of directing that energy to the higher centres. Everybody knows how this energy is to be created, but nobody knows how to direct it to the higher centres. In fact, very few people have a full and positive understanding of this natural event which almost everybody in this world experiences. If the conjugal experience, which is generally very transitory, could be extended for a period of time, then the experience of enlightenment would take place.

What sort of aspirants qualify for vama marga?

In tantra, the practice of maithuna is said to be the easiest way to awaken sushumna, because it involves an act which most people are already accustomed to. But, frankly speaking, very few are prepared for this path. Ordinary sexual interaction is not maithuna. The physical act may be the same, but the background is totally different.

In the relationship between husband and wife, for example, there is dependency and ownership. But in maithuna there is no idea of ownership; each partner is independent, one with himself. Another difficult thing in tantric sadhana is cultivating the attitude of passionlessness. The man has to virtually become brahmacharya in order to free the mind and emotions of sexual thoughts and passion which normally arise in the presence of a woman.

Both partners must be absolutely purified and controlled internally and externally before they enter maithuna. This is difficult for the ordinary person to comprehend because for most people, sexual interaction is the result of passion and physical or emotional attraction, either for progeny or pleasure. It is only when you are purified that these instinctive urges are absent. This is why, according to tradition, the right-hand path of *dakshina marga* must be followed for many

years before the path of vama marga can be entered. Then the interaction of maithuna does not take place for physical gratification. The purpose is very clear – awakening of sushumna, raising the kundalini from mooladhara chakra, and exploding the unconscious areas of the brain.

If this purpose is not clear when you practise vama marga and sushumna wakes up, you will not be able to face the experience. Your head will get hot and you will have unbearable experiences. You will not be able to control the passion and excitement because you have not tranquillized your brain.

Therefore, in my opinion, only those who are adepts in yoga qualify for vama marga. This path is not to be used as a pretext for self-indulgence. It is meant for mature and serious-minded householder sadhakas, who are evolved, who have been practising sadhana to awaken the energy potential and to attain samadhi. They must utilize this path as a vehicle of awakening. Otherwise it becomes a path of downfall.

Does vama marga only involve the sexual act or are there other practices?

Nowadays, most people think vama marga means sexual indulgence, and that is why this branch of tantra is so greatly misunderstood. The sexual act is only one item of vama marga, it is certainly not the total of it. Out of a practice which takes three to four hours, the sexual act takes maybe twenty to fifty minutes.

It should also be noted that the practitioner of vama marga is not compelled to involve himself in sexual life very frequently. Sometimes it is biannual or triannual, not because he wants to control, but because he is fulfilled. It is not possible to have the experience every day because it is so explosive that you feel it for fifteen days afterwards.

What are the five specific elements of vama marga and how are they utilized?

The five *tattwas* or elements of tantra are *madya*, wine; *mamsa*, flesh; *maithuna*, sexual union; *mantra*, chanting and

contemplating certain syllables; and *mudra*, practices like shambhavi mudra, vajroli mudra, etc. There are specific rites which the practitioners must perform utilizing these tattwas. For example, there is a specific ritual for taking a bath and dressing and there is a ceremony involving mantra and incantation for purification of the physical, mental and emotional bodies. The practitioners must also know in which particular order the mantras have to be repeated, on which centre of the body they should be concentrating, what mudras are to be performed and when, for how long they should meditate and at which moment they should drink the wine, offer the meat and perform maithuna.

Whether people are aware of it or not, the tattwas are part of their religion and culture even today. It is most important that they understand the nature of these five elements because they are necessary for the awakening of kundalini from mooladhara to swadhisthana.

How does one get initiated into vama marga?

I can assure you that the gurus who teach vama marga do not openly publicize the fact. They always remain quiet. First they initiate people into ordinary practices and from that group of people they select the right aspirants and teach them.

What sort of partner is necessary for the practice of vama marga?

It is important that both partners have the same temperament. Their minds must work in the same direction and their likes and dislikes should be the same. It is also important that the woman is more adept than the man, because in vama marga she conducts everything. The woman has to know the whole art of awakening kundalini.

Does that mean the woman takes the superior role in maithuna?

Just as in the scheme of creation Shakti is the creator and Shiva is the witness of the whole game, in tantra the woman has

the status of guru and the man takes the role of disciple. The tantric tradition is actually passed on from the woman to the man. In the tantric practice, it is the woman who initiates.

It is only by her power that the act of maithuna takes place. All the preliminaries are performed by her. She puts the mark on the man's forehead and tells him where to meditate. In ordinary interaction, the man takes the aggressive role and the woman participates, but in tantra, the two switch roles. The woman becomes the operator and the man her medium. She has to be able to arouse him. Then, at the right moment she must create the bindu so he can practise vajroli. If the man loses his bindu, it means that the woman has failed to carry out her functions properly.

In tantra it is said that Shiva is incapable without Shakti. Shakti is the priestess. Therefore, when vama marga is practised, the man must have an absolutely tantric attitude towards the woman. He cannot behave with her as men generally do with other women. Ordinarily, when a man looks at a woman, he becomes passionate, but in maithuna this should not happen. He should see her as the divine mother, Devi, and approach her with devotion and surrender, not with lust.

Why is ejaculation avoided in maithuna?

According to the tantric process, ejaculation should not take place. One should learn how to stop it. For this purpose, the male partner should perfect the practices of vajroli mudra as well as moola bandha and uddiyana bandha. When these three kriyas are perfected, one is able to stop ejaculation completely at any point of the experience.

Ejaculation is not avoided because of loss in terms of the chemical structure of semen, but because it brings down the energy level. The sexual act culminates in a particular experience which is reached only at the point of an explosion of energy. Unless the energy explodes, the experience cannot take place, but this experience has to be maintained so that the energy level remains high. When the energy level falls, ejaculation takes place. Therefore, ejaculation is avoided,

not so much to preserve the semen, but because it causes a depression in the level of energy.

To make this energy travel upwards through the spine, certain hatha yoga kriyas have to be mastered. The experience which accompanies this energy has to be raised to the higher centres. It is only possible to do this if you are able to maintain that experience. As long as the experience continues, you can direct it to the higher centres, but as soon as the energy level undergoes depression, ejaculation will take place.

Ejaculation brings down the temperature of the body and at the same time the nervous systems undergo depression. When the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems undergo depression, it affects the brain. That is why many people have mental problems. When you are able to retain the semen and do not ejaculate at all, the energy in the nervous system and the temperature in the body are maintained and at the same time you are free from the sense of loss, depression, frustration and guilt. Retaining the bindu will also help to increase the sexual frequency, and that is better for both partners. The sexual act does not have to create weakness or dissipate the energy; on the contrary it can become a means of exploding the energy. Therefore, the value of retaining the bindu should not be underestimated.

In hatha yoga there are certain practices which must be perfected for this purpose. You should begin with asanas such as paschimottanasana, shalabhasana, vajrasana, supta vajrasana and siddhasana. These postures are beneficial because they place an automatic contraction on the lower centres. Sirshasana is also important because it ventilates the brain so that all of one's experiences are healthy experiences. When these postures have been mastered, shambhavi mudra is perfected so that the concentration can be held steadily at bhrumadhya. Then vajroli mudra has to be practised together with moola bandha and uddiyana bandha in kumbhaka. It is necessary to practise kumbhaka when the ejaculation is being held. Retention of the breath and the bindu go hand in hand. Loss of kumbhaka is loss of bindu, and loss of bindu is loss of kumbhaka.

During kumbhaka, when you are maintaining the experience, you should be able to direct it to the higher centres. If you are able to create an archetype of this experience, perhaps in the form of a serpent or a luminous continuity, then the result will be fantastic. So in spiritual life, the bindu must be preserved at all costs.

What is the bindu?

Bindu means a point or a drop. In tantra, *bindu* is considered to be the nucleus, or the abode of matter, the point from which all creation becomes manifest. Actually, the source of bindu is in the higher centres of the brain, but due to the development of emotions and passions, bindu falls down to the lower region where it is transformed into sperm or ova. At the higher level, bindu is a point. At the lower level it is a drop of liquid which exudes from the male and female orgasm.

According to tantra, preservation of the bindu is absolutely necessary for two reasons. Firstly, the process of regeneration can only be carried out with the help of bindu. Secondly, all the spiritual experiences take place when there is an explosion of bindu. This explosion can result in the creation of a thought or of anything. Therefore, in tantra, certain practices are recommended by which the male partner can stop ejaculation and retain the bindu.

Can you tell us something about the female experience?

In the female body, mooladhara chakra is situated at the cervix, just behind the opening of the uterus. This is the point where space and time unite and explode in the form of an experience. That experience is known as orgasm in ordinary language, but in the language of tantra it is called an awakening. In order to maintain the continuity of that experience, it is necessary for a build-up of energy to take place at that particular bindu or point. Usually this does not happen, because the explosion of energy, in the form of experience, dissipates throughout the body through the sexual medium. In order to avoid this, the woman must be able to hold her mind in

absolute concentration on that particular point. For this, she must be able to practise sahajoli. Sahajoli is actually concentration on the bindu, but this is very difficult. Therefore, for a long time sahajoli should be practised by contracting the vaginal and uterine muscles.

If girls are taught uddiyana bandha at an early age, they will perfect sahajoli quite naturally in the course of time. Uddiyana bandha is always practised with external retention. It is important to be able to perform this in any position. Usually it is practised in siddha yoni asana, but one should be able to do it in vajrasana or the crow posture as well. When you practise uddiyana bandha, the other two bandhas, jalandhara and moola bandha, occur spontaneously.

Years of this practice will create a keen sense of concentration on the correct point in the body. This concentration is more mental in nature, but at the same time, since it is not possible to do it mentally, one has to start from some physical point. If a woman is able to concentrate and maintain the continuity of the experience, she will be able to awaken her energy to a very high level.

There are two different areas of orgasm. One is in the nervous zone, which is the common experience for most women, and the other is in mooladhara chakra. When sahajoli is practised during maithuna, mooladhara chakra wakes up and the spiritual or tantric orgasm takes place.

When the female yogi is able to practise sahajoli for five to fifteen minutes, she can retain the tantric orgasm for that period of time. By retaining this experience for a long period, the flow of energy is reversed. Circulation of blood and sympathetic/parasympathetic forces move upward. At this point she transcends normal consciousness and sees the light. That is how she enters the deep state of dhyana. Unless the woman is able to practise sahajoli, she will not be able to retain the impulses necessary for the tantric orgasm, and consequently she will have the nervous orgasm, which is short-lived and followed by dissatisfaction and exhaustion. This is often the cause of hysteria and depression.

When a female practises maithuna, how does she prevent conception?

She has to know the natural method of avoiding pregnancy. In vama marga there are no pills or medicines. These things interfere with the hormonal processes and the yogini never resorts to them. She knows a special practice which produces an important hormone called prostaglandin. This hormone destroys the ova before fertilization, thereby preventing conception.

Who would benefit more by practising vama marga, the young people or the old?

Well, there is little chance for the people who are over fifty to practise left-hand tantra. Not that they are disqualified, but they have missed the bus. It is the young people who will benefit most from this science. For them it will fulfil two promises. First of all, they will be able to transcend the urge through involving themselves in it, and secondly, they will have such a rich experience from the awakening of the brain.



15

The Mind

What is the mind and how does one become aware of it?

Let us call the mind 'consciousness'. Through this instrument we are aware of time, space and objects. This form of awareness is a composition of various elements, including the five elements of nature, five functions of prana, five sense organs and five motor organs. When these come together, the consciousness begins to function. Both modern psychology and Indian philosophy agree on this.

The deep-rooted archetypes in human consciousness, which number in the billions, are ultimately responsible for man's experiences. How can we reach these archetypes and expose them to the conscious area of the mind? Nature, of course, lifts them into the subconscious mind or to the bottom of the conscious mind by developing visions or dreams. But if you can stimulate this level of the mind through sound or in other ways, you can realize more and more of these archetypes. This is an important subject in yoga, often ignored by those who teach. The science of archetypes is just as important as the study of the elements in the physical body. We have analyzed the body extensively in terms of flesh, bones and blood, but if we agree that man is more than just this, we must investigate further.

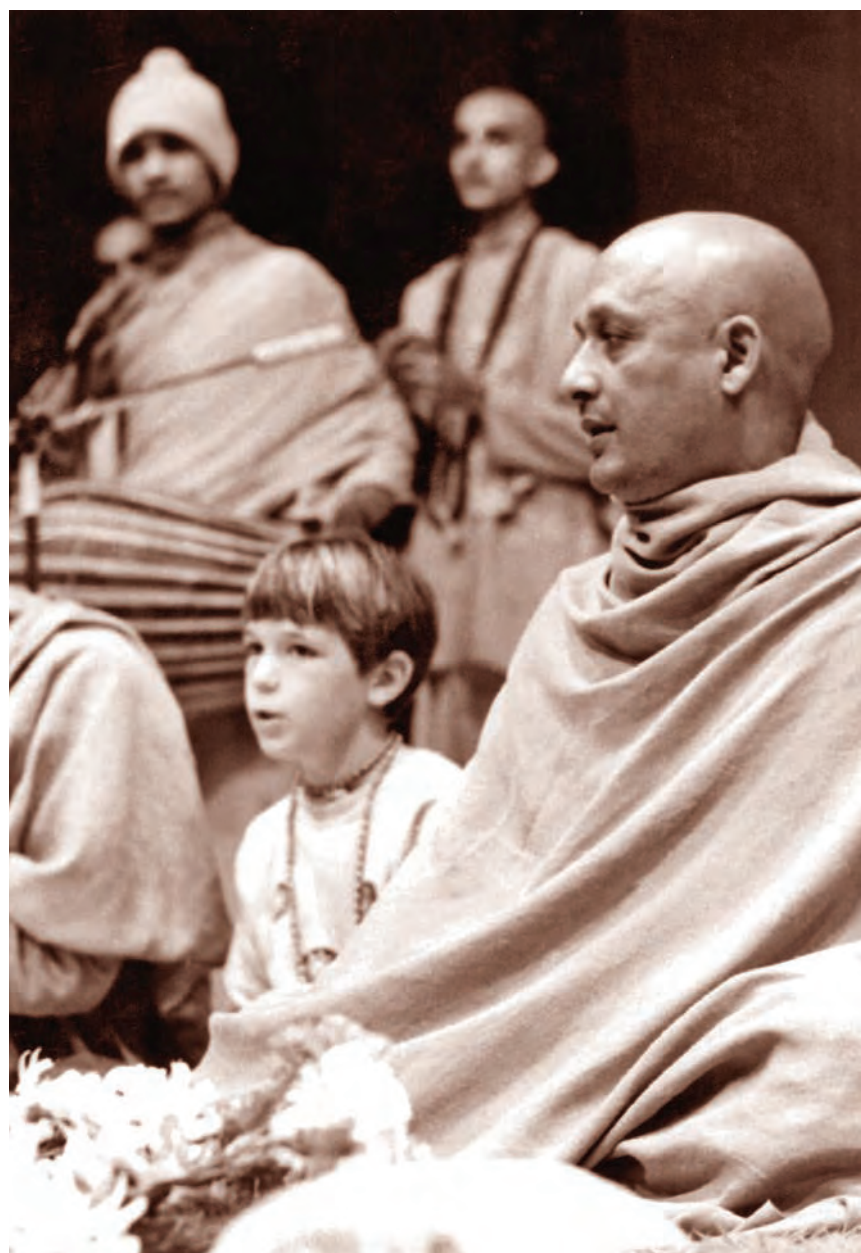
Disease is an experience, either on the mental or physical level. A headache, cold, cough, tuberculosis, cancer or whatever is simply an experience. Even multiple sclerosis is an experience. If you go to your lawn and uproot every blade of

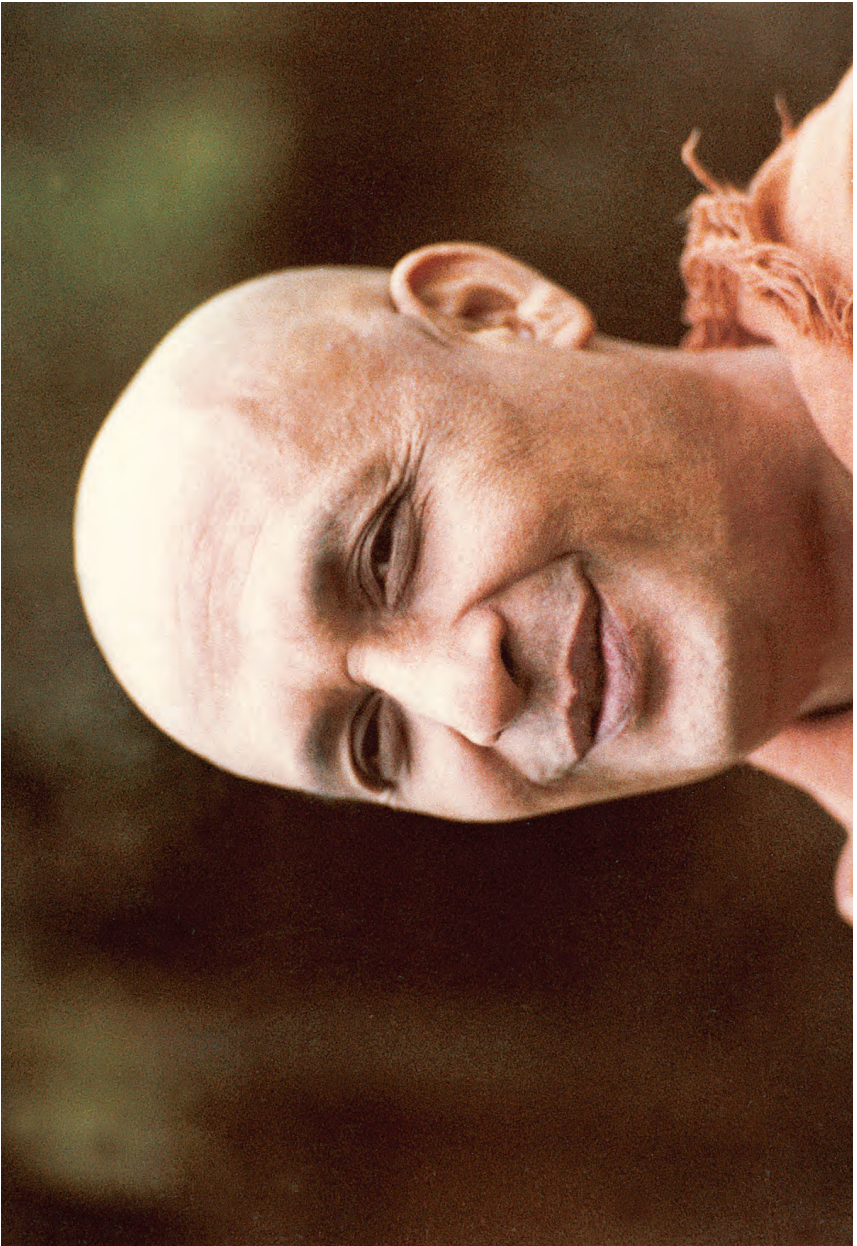




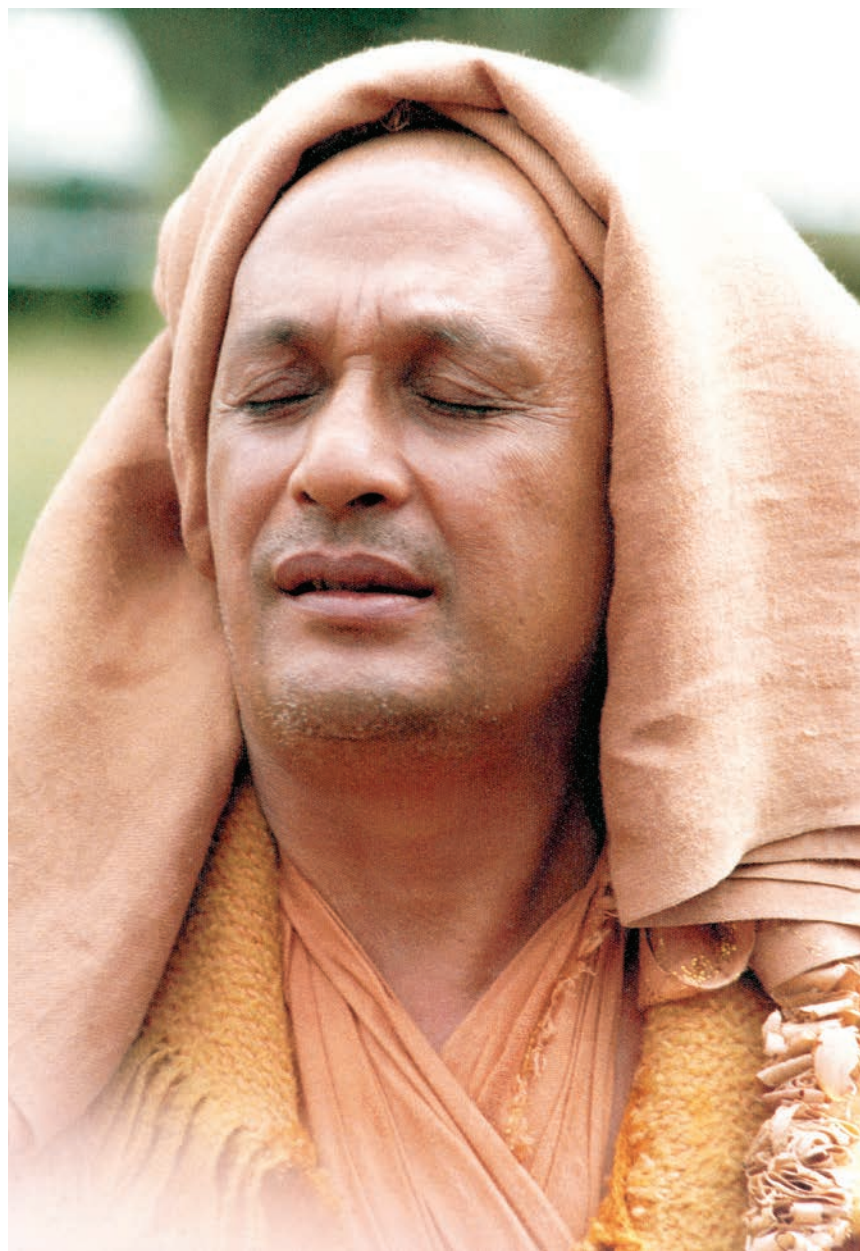












grass, the grass will come up again a few days later because the seeds are still there. In the same way, experiences in this life are all retained in symbolic form in the consciousness of man. And these experiences come out in the form of life, events, activities, disease, dreams, visions and sometimes insanity.

If we can find a way to bring these *samskaras* or archetypes to the surface, many problems, fears and phobias could be eradicated overnight. Specific yoga practices, especially yoga nidra, make this experience possible.

Is awareness something that happens very gradually, or do you suddenly wake up one day?

Awareness can grow gradually and it can also explode suddenly. However, it is better if it grows gradually, as people cannot always cope with the experience of a sudden explosion.

How does the awareness function?

In tantra and vedanta, we have four tools of awareness: *manas*, thinking and counter-thinking; *buddhi*, decisions, discrimination, discernment; *chitta*, awareness, remembering, feeling; and *ahamkara*, ego or id. These four divisions belong to the area of the mind which is known. They also process material coming down from the subtler areas of the mind which are unknown.

The areas of the mind which are known, we call manomaya kosha. The unknown areas consist of vijñanamaya kosha, the psychic ranges of consciousness, and anandamaya kosha, the dynamic consciousness where all manifestations exist in the potential state. This is the subterranean area of consciousness and man will never be able to know it. Sometimes when you enter into deep meditation, you pass through anandamaya kosha where there is homogeneity but no awareness. Anandamaya kosha can be reached through laya yoga.

Manomaya, vijñanamaya and anandamaya koshas have their equivalents in western psychology. Manomaya kosha is equated with the conscious mind, vijñanamaya kosha with the subconscious and anandamaya kosha with the unconscious.

What are the main yogic techniques for bringing the unconscious to the conscious mind?

Experiencing the unconscious cannot be achieved directly. You need the guidance of an expert guru for some time. When the guru is able to stabilize the light in the forehead, then you can go ahead yourself. When the senses and the mind are withdrawn, who is the seer? You perceive with your mind, and if the mind is withdrawn, with what will you recognize the unconscious? The same question was asked in one of the Upanishads: "How can you be a witness of your homogeneous consciousness, because it is through the senses and the mind that you witness an experience?"

In *laya yoga samadhi*, the yogis enter into the dormant potential state of mind. They become completely dead to life and all existence. During that period there is no time and no space and no existence for them. There is no 'I' or 'you' or 'that'. They are not even aware of where they are. But by the grace of the guru, they have one spot of light in *bhramadhiya*, and that is the only thing they witness. They do not even know they are witnessing, but they are. As long as the light is there they have the experience of the unconscious. The moment the light begins to diminish, the yogi has to retreat or he will die.

Is everything we see and feel only a projection of our own mind?

Everybody sees only himself in others. I see you as a very nice person because I am a nice person. You are only a stimulating factor for the love and hatred that are within me. The whole attitude of a human being is an expression of his own personality. Therefore, it is said in the Upanishads: "Not for the sake of the wife is the wife dear to you, but for your own sake. Not for the sake of the friend is the friend dear to you, but for your own sake."

The Upanishads cite many similar examples which finally conclude that everything is centred in one's own self. In Buddhism we also find the same theory. All experiences and perceptions originate within the individual; the knowledge

gathered from outside takes place within the mind. This means the whole universe you are cognizing is not outside but within you. If the entire time and space could be within you, why not your love and your hatred, your pride and your prejudice?

So, it seems that the human being is experiencing a great hallucination. A magician can cast a spell and you see a beautiful garden or a radiant damsel, then another spell and there is nothing. What happened? You saw it. Where did it come from and where did it go? The magician is just exposing your self; the nature is expressing your self; you are projecting your self outside. In the ultimate analysis, this is the truth.

You have been quoted as saying that the mind can create matter. Can you be more explicit on this subject?

For most of us the mind is a thinking vehicle, a tool for the thinking process, but in yoga the mind is more than that. When the mind is in a state of dissipation, it creates problems for itself and when it is in a state of unhappiness, it creates disasters for itself. But when the same mind is tamed through the practice of yoga, it becomes a solid creator. Even as in its dissipated state it created unhappiness and disaster, in this higher state it can create matter; it can create objects.

In yoga the mind is not only a tool for thinking, it is homogeneous consciousness. When the mind is unified and brought to a state of concentration, it becomes powerful. When you take matter and disintegrate it, eventually nuclear energy is produced. In the same way, when the mind is purified through meditation, and when all that remains is the mind and not the worldly desires and associations, then the mind becomes potential shakti or power. That is how the mind becomes creative.

Yogis and philosophers say there is no physical world apart from the mind, but we experience the world and it is there. How are we to understand?

This is a problem which has been discussed in India for the last fifteen to twenty thousand years: whether there is creation or it is all an illusion. Is it a dream, or is there something real?

In western philosophy, there is Hegel's idealism, Descartes' non-dual monistic philosophy. In India, Shankaracharya had his own monistic philosophy and his paramguru had declared that there was no existence of time and space at all. The gist of the *Yoga Vashishtha* is that everything is a fantasy. Time and space are playing games with each other.

It is difficult for people to accept that the world is an illusion, but there is a very simple logic behind it. In a dream you are riding on an elephant and the elephant throws you off. You get a fracture and are screaming with pain. Then you wake up and there is no elephant, no accident, no pain. Now, the question arises whether the dream world is true or this world is true. In either case, there should be a continuity of experience because truth is never barred by time and space. Truth has to be eternal and infinite. When you say that your waking consciousness is true, why is it limited and barred by another form of experience?

This means that the waking consciousness is not absolute; it is relative and the dream is also relative. Dream is one event and waking is another. Dream is a psycho-emotional event and waking consciousness is a psycho-sensual event. The truth must be absolute and not relative. Then how to believe that this external experience is absolute? If it is not absolute, then it is not truth. If it is not truth, it does not exist.

In modern physics, we also have something like this. In Einstein's theory of relativity, there are three forms of existence: absolute, relative, and what we call illusion. Dream is an illusion, this world is relative, and samadhi is absolute.

There is a saying: 'The mind is above the body, the thoughts are above the mind and the shakti is above the thoughts.' Would you please explain this?

This can be expressed in another way; the mind is more powerful than the body, the thoughts are more powerful than the mind, and the shakti is more powerful than the thoughts. It can also be expressed as: the mind is subtler than the body, the thoughts are subtler than the mind and

the shakti is subtler than the thoughts. This expression can also be reversed: shakti controls the thoughts, by controlling the thoughts the mind is controlled, and by controlling the mind the body is controlled.

How does one train the mind?

Just as you train a small child. You don't commence a child's education by teaching him mathematics or geography. His mind has to be trained gradually and systematically. Whatever you teach him is a preparation for the next stage. Like this, the whole syllabus of yoga is intended to train the mind in a very systematic and thorough way.

Can you explain to us what self is?

The self or *atman* is what I am. It is the basis of my existence, the background of my awareness, and the fact of my continuity. Self is the one thing that continues behind all the changes. The body, mind, experiences, concepts, philosophy and values are changing, but I am the same as I was thirty or forty years ago. All those things are just external manifestations of the spirit.

Now, this spirit has to be realized in samadhi. You should come to a point of consciousness where you are not aware of name and you are not aware of form. At that time the spiritual experience takes place. No matter how much you discuss the self, you will never be able to know it. The self can only be known through direct experience, and this will only occur in samadhi.

After attaining samadhi will the atman be liberated?

The atman is not bound. It is always free, divine and untainted. It does not have to evolve; it is absolutely complete. Even now it is shining like the sun, but you are not able to see it because there are a lot of clouds covering it. You do not have to do anything to illumine the sun; you have only to remove the clouds. You have a beautiful face but a dirty mirror. Therefore, you are unable to see your face. In this case, it is not necessary to

clean your face, you have to clean the mirror. Likewise, to see the atman you have only to remove the veils. Gold is always gold. A goldsmith does not make gold, but he has to know it is gold. Even if you do not know it is gold, still it is gold.

What are the veils that prevent us from seeing the atman?

One is called avidya and the other is known as maya. Maya means to see a thing when it is not there, or to have a misunderstanding with the absence of a base. You are not unhappy, but you feel unhappy. That is *maya*, illusion. In avidya there is something there, but you misunderstand it. There is a rope and in the darkness you think it is a snake. So the illusion of the snake is dependent on the rope. That is *avidya*, ignorance. But sometimes there is no rope, no base, but still you have the illusion that there is a snake. That is maya.

In modern psychology we have two words for these – psychosis and neurosis, and all of us are suffering from these. When there is no problem, but still you think there is a problem, that is psychosis. When there is some reason for the problem and you misunderstand or amplify it, that is called neurosis. Neurosis and psychosis, maya and avidya, are the two habitual behaviours of the human mind. If you want to progress in spiritual life, you have to recognize and remove these two manifestations. Love and hatred, desire and frustration, attraction and repulsion, tragedy and comedy, all these are creations of these two attitudes of the mind.

How does one transcend maya?

It is very difficult to transcend maya because the whole of your experience is born of maya. Even if you try to transcend it, this action of transcendence is also influenced by maya. If you really want to withdraw the magic veil which is being cast on you, the only way to do it is to remove the magician himself. Who is the magician? The mind is the main instigator of all this illusion and it has to be suppressed. But don't do it now. The mind is your most important servant. Without it you can't do anything; you are lame and blind.

Therefore, before you get rid of this mind, you have to develop another faculty. We call it the supermind or the higher mind. You may call it intuition. This faculty, which is completely dormant in most of us, is just like the mind. It can conduct perception, cognition and everything. However, it takes time to develop the supermind, but once it begins to function, it operates through your body, senses, understanding, sentiment and emotion. Then, simultaneously, you have two faculties: the maya mind and the maya-less mind. When you have both these minds, and you know you are able to function very well on the worldly plane, you don't need to listen to the maya mind anymore. This is how you overcome maya and the senses as well.

You can domesticate a horse and yoke it to a cart. You can train a monkey or a powerful elephant, but you can't train the maya because it is very tricky. It is so tricky that it hasn't even spared the great saints and men of wisdom. So, for the time being, let us not worry about the maya. Let her stay with you. Don't create enmity and fight with her. Instead you must develop higher awareness. Then, when you are established in that, you can do what you like with her.

Is imagination a good thing?

Yes, I believe it is. Imagination and fantasy form the basis of human creativity. The people who are able to fantasize and imagine strive to achieve a part of that imagination and they become the creators, the inventors, musicians and artists. A person without imagination, *kalpana shakti*, is just like an animal in human form.

What is the role of the intellect?

Well, to answer this question, I will quote the words of Sri Aurobindo: "Intellect was the helper. Now it is the barrier". At one stage you have to accept and utilize the intellect, but at the final stage you have to transcend it in order to develop your inner spiritual awareness, which will carry you to the higher stages of illumination.

What is intuition?

Intuition is a type of cognition. It is a form of knowledge, but it does not have any evidence or source. When you perceive through the eyes, nose or ears, it is called sensory knowledge. When perception takes place through a process of logic, it is called intellectual knowledge. And when knowledge takes place independently of all these, it is called intuitive knowledge. Intuition develops through the process of meditation and other spiritual practices.

Can one have higher knowledge if intellectually uneducated?

Yes, definitely. Many people, including astounding astrologers, musicians, visionary artists and poets, have spontaneous experiences of the psychic or supramental self. These experiences occur quite unexpectedly and they are not at all dependent on acquired knowledge and the sources that we have. The knowledge is largely independent.

For example, everybody has a mind and most people can think, but they have no control over their mind and their thoughts. There are times when you want to think about something but a barrier appears before the mental vision and you can't think. In most people the mental vision is very limited. However, there is a point where the mind becomes unlimited. There are people who can think on any topic, not only things they have learned, but anything at all. This experience is spontaneous and comes from time to time, but as the psychic personality evolves, it becomes constant and you have a greater control over the expressions and manifestations of the psychic mind.

Can you comment on the relationship between the inner space and the outer space?

Well, inner space and outer space are the areas of the mind's cognition. There is actually no inner or outer space. This classification is dependent on the tool of your cognition. When your mind cognizes through the senses, you say what it

experiences is external space. And when your mind is isolated from the senses and the objects and is introverted, then what it experiences is the inner space. So, inner space and external space are experiences; they are not exactly space.

Is the mind capable of materialization, and if so, what is its mechanism?

Thought is not mind, emotion is not mind, memory is not mind; mind is a force. In science, force is matter converted. Matter, force and light are all interconvertible.

Imagine a flower in the garden. You like it so much that you carry the impression of the flower with you. Now everywhere you go, you visualize the flower. You have converted matter into mind. If you see a dead body and think 'horrible', you carry it with you wherever you go. Even while eating and sleeping you see that dead body in front of you. This means that you have converted an image into an idea. In this way, any object can be converted into an idea or, on the other hand, any idea can be converted into matter.

When you are concentrating on a particular force, you are trying to crystallize that force, slowly freeing it from its gross contents. A thought is a force, but when it is used for thinking, feeling and remembering, then gross matter is added to it. If the gross matter is not added to the force, the mind will not be able to experience anything. Therefore, during meditation a particular force is created around an object, such as a flame, a flower, a cross, a golden egg or any other thing.

Let us take the golden egg. Now you are going to condense and concentrate the mental forces in the shape of the golden egg. All the mental energies which are usually dissipated in day-to-day experiences become one-pointed. You don't see, hear, feel, taste or smell. The mental force has withdrawn from these processes, and you are not even aware of yourself. When the whole energy is concentrated on one point, it becomes creative. You have seen that when water is dissipated, it has no volume, velocity or force, but if it is concentrated into one channel, it becomes powerful. It can create havoc

or it can run generators and make electricity. Solar energy is dissipated, but when it is concentrated by a magnifying glass, it can burn anything. So the energy is conceived in its concentrated form. When you are focusing on the golden egg, you are trying to concentrate the dissipated energies of the mind at one point.

How does marijuana or any other drug help in the evolution of consciousness?

Marijuana and other drugs calm the senses, but so far as the evolution is concerned, I don't think they have any role to play. According to Patanjali, there are five ways to become a perfect master of the mind. The first is by birth; second is by mantra; third is by austerity; fourth is by herbs; fifth is by practice of concentration. The herbs should be understood to mean marijuana, LSD, soma and such things.

During the Rigvedic period they used a plant called soma. By drinking its juice, they used to experience an exalted state of mind. Then they used to meditate and pray. But finally soma was withdrawn because they found that it did not really influence the evolution. It only created a chemical change in the structure of the brain and body. In the same way, in the last few decades, many people have been taking marijuana, LSD and other things. The only change that has taken place is that they have developed a love of spiritual life, and by taking recourse to these drugs, some of their drives have been reduced.

16

Spiritual Experiences

What causes psychic experiences during meditation?

When you practise yoga and meditation, you are evolving your level of consciousness; you are moving ahead on the inner planes. I am not talking about the evolution of the body, or even of the mind, but of consciousness. When the consciousness is in the process of evolving, at a certain level it experiences gross things, such as sound, touch, form and smell.

When you are practising sadhana, the consciousness departs from the gross level, which is experienced through the physical body, and is experienced through the pranic body. Later, in the course of evolution, it is experienced through the mental body and then the psychic and unconscious bodies. Remember this order: the gross body is *annamaya kosha*, composed of food; next is *pranayama kosha*, purely prana; subtler is *manomaya kosha*, the mind stuff; still subtler is *vijnanamaya kosha*, the psychic body, and finally *anandamaya kosha*, the unconscious bliss body. These are the five stages of our existence. When the consciousness reaches the psychic body, visions appear.

How does one experience the divine?

If you want to have this experience, then firstly you must purify your instruments of experience. Unless your mirror is clean, you will never see your face. Only when you have developed your intuition, your inner eye, will you be able to

see God. Just now we have no inner eyes, we are blind. We have physical eyes through which we see forms, but no inner eyes by which to see beyond these forms. So, to experience the divine we must develop our intuition through meditation.

When one is meditating on a mantra, sometimes there is an experience of blissful pleasure. Should one be carried away by this sensation or should one stop it?

When you are practising mantra, the mantra will charge your mind and it may induce an experience of bliss or pleasure, but you should not be concerned with that. Just follow the mantra and ignore the experience. The more you follow the mantra, the deeper the experience will become, but you have to ignore it. The way is clear; just follow the light. Your mantra is the light. Even though the experiences will often attack you powerfully, you must try not to be influenced by them. They can completely take you away from the goal and are obstacles on the path of meditation.

What causes visions of light and other experiences during the practices of concentration?

When you practise concentration, the experiences that occur indicate that your concentration is becoming deeper. When concentration intensifies, there is a slight vibration in the silent areas of the brain, and as a result, visions and other sensations occur.

In between the brain and skull there is a substance known as dura fluid which protects the brain. This cerebral fluid is affected by different chemicals. For example, if you take LSD, hashish, or other forms of narcotics, they influence the chemical structure of the dura fluid and change its density. This creates a stir in different areas of the brain, and as a result, visions, dreams and other sensations occur.

Amrit, the immortalizing nectar produced through yogic practices, also affects the dura fluid and consequently the brain. When this happens the experiences are very great and exploding and if you are concentrating on different chakras,

sensations awaken in different parts of your brain. But of course these experiences should be understood to be experiences at the border line of manomaya kosha and vijñanamaya kosha.

A few days after I started practising shavasana I began to feel movement in my brain. I saw many clear and brilliantly coloured pictures. What are these images and can I control them?

The answer is complex. When life is born, the *atma*, the consciousness, brings within it eternal memories and memories which we inherit from our parents and grandparents. There are millions of these thoughts in molecular form, but we are not aware of them. They are called archetypes. They are formless and weightless, and they do not require a space. At one point in the brain there may be millions of them. Some of them we may recognize, but there are others which we definitely have not seen in this life.

When you practise sadhana, you often come across these archetypes and see them in form. Sometimes they manifest themselves in dreams or during drowsiness. Drugs such as mescaline, ganja and heroin provoke them. Some archetypes are associated with the process of knowledge. Maybe my father's father's grandfather knew or liked Kalidas, or maybe my father's mother's father was an astrologer. All that they knew is stored in me and sometimes it might come out at random when I practise sadhana. You know how a company must keep all its account books for many years before they can be destroyed, so in your brain these account books are maintained in a very subtle way. They are stored just like scrolls in a time capsule. Even if you can't accept the theory of transmigration, you cannot ignore the theory of inheritance of this molecular structure of genes because it has been proved beyond doubt.

When you have these experiences, remember that nothing is coming from outside, it is all here within. Each and every psychic experience is a passing show and you shouldn't be

attached to that. If you have an experience, it's alright, but don't have any attachment to it. Forget it. Keep yourself completely free mentally, then you may have more experiences.

There comes a time when you can constantly visualize these experiences with your eyes open, just as you can see any object here. Out of these experiences comes knowledge. Great scientists, inventors, artists, musicians, adventures and military generals had these experiences and were inspired by them to fulfil their mission in life.

During meditation I often feel energy, something like goose pimples, flooding through the body. Please explain.

In the physical body you have ida nadi and pingala nadi. Ida controls the consciousness, the mind, and pingala controls the prana or life force. The life force represents heat in the body and the mental force represents coolness in the body. Sometimes during meditation, ida nadi becomes effective and pingala nadi is suppressed. Then one feels cold currents, or even freezing in the body. On the other hand, when pingala is in action, one has the feeling of heat or light. Any experience of heat or cold in the body means that your meditation has touched either ida or pingala nadi. This occurs when your nadis were not purified before you started to practise your particular system of meditation.

In yoga sadhana, one must have complete control over the functions of ida and pingala. In order to ensure this, meditation should be preceded by nadi shodhana pranayama, as this practice purifies the nadis. Experiences arising from the awakening of either ida or pingala are not wanted because they are not the real experiences. The experiences which develop after the awakening of sushumna are real and spiritual experiences. It is through the awakening of sushumna nadi that kundalini shakti is aroused.

Can you describe sushumna awakening?

The first important experience in the awakening of sushumna is the development of awareness of the whole of mooladhara

chakra. Even as you have a pain in a particular part of the body and you are totally aware of that area, in the same way the experience in mooladhara must become clear and absolute. Then the next experience must take place.

In this experience the activities of ida and pingala are under control. Then for some moments the mind loses hold over its normal experience. You are neither aware of sensual life nor mental life. You are not aware of subconscious life or even of unconscious life. That experience is not dream, it is not sleep, nor is it waking. It is a momentary experience which is different from these three usual states. If this experience takes place, either as the first or second experience, then know you are on the right track.

While practising nada sanchalana, I sometimes hear galloping horses. Why is this?

When you practise nada yoga, the consciousness can enter the psychic body and create different experiences. These experiences can be termed visions. They do not seem to have relevance to our day-to-day life, or to our spiritual practice, so it is very difficult to interpret them in terms of our knowledge.

Our psychic body has millions of impressions; it is like a storeroom which contains a great stock of samskaras. Therefore, when the consciousness enters the psychic body, many of the impressions that are embedded there become clear and visible to you. Some people hear bells ringing or birds chirping, others hear claps of thunder. Many people hear singing at the dead of night, drums beating, a conch, flute or vina, galloping horses, ocean waves and hundreds and thousands of beautiful or horrible sounds. Sometimes they also see visions or taste particular things.

The psychic body, *vijnanamaya kosha*, can have ordinary visions or it can have very impressive visions. Sometimes the visions are so impressive that they influence life itself. If the impression from the psychic body is great, it will penetrate the other planes of consciousness.

You may have heard about the peculiar behaviour of the Greek heretics and some of the Christian saints or Indian avadhootas. Their behaviour seems very strange because when they come down from vijñanamaya kosha, they bring back its full influence and it continues in their everyday life. Many great mystics and saints who enter the higher domain come down with that consciousness. When they revert to normal consciousness, their great vision continues. For most of us this seems very abnormal, but some saints live in this world in vijñanamaya kosha. For example, Aurobindo often spoke about bringing the higher consciousness down to earth.

The experience you had was a light experience which occurred when you entered vijñanamaya kosha. You came back to manomaya kosha and now your experience of vijñanamaya kosha is only a memory and no longer an experience. In meditation you heard galloping horses, but can you hear them now? If you can, it means you have brought vijñanamaya kosha to manomaya kosha. If you can't hear them now, then you have come back to manomaya kosha without the influence of vijñanamaya kosha, with only a memory of it. All these experiences and many more, pleasant and unpleasant, will occur when your consciousness is entering the domain of vijñanamaya kosha, the psychic realm.

During meditation I often visualize a swami. Every detail is clear except he has no head. What does this indicate?

That is you. In one's own way, one projects one's own self, and not having a head means you are aware of yourself without ego.

Some people say they hear a voice that gives them guidance. Can that voice be coming from the higher mind or is this schizophrenic behaviour?

If somebody hears a voice in their ears and their mind has not been purified and trained, and they are emotionally confused, surely that's schizophrenia. But if a person has spiritual development and he has trained and purified his body and mind,

then this voice which comes from within emanates from a very great depth of his being. It can emanate from the astral or causal body, or from the bodies beyond these. It can also emanate from a transcendental plane. When it emanates from a transcendental plane it is known as revelation. The Bible, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana* and Koran were all revelations.

When the voice comes from the astral plane, it is only partly correct and the instructions can be misleading. When it comes from the casual body, the deeper body, then its guidance in matters of life is very exact. Therefore, for a sadhaka or a spiritual aspirant, these inner voices symbolize the awakening of the different levels of his invisible existence, but for an untrained one it is schizophrenia.

Many years ago when I was practising yoga, I saw the death of a woman eight days before she died. I was also able to cure people with my thoughts and people started to think I had powers. Can you explain this?

When you practise yoga, you are able to change the molecular structures in the brain and make the mind a powerful force. It can know things in advance and it can influence objects and impose a thought on others. These are known as psychic manifestations and they occur in everybody who reaches a particular stage of evolution. In some aspirants they come very late in spiritual life, while in others they come early. It all depends on how highly one has evolved in a previous incarnation.

I have come across many people who have telepathy, clairvoyance and the power to influence material objects, and I do not underestimate them. Surely they are capacities, but they are limited and they are obstacles on the spiritual path. It is said in the yogic scriptures that even if you have psychic powers, you must have restraint over them because their mental force should be preserved and conserved. You can utilize it for higher spiritual pursuits.

When one practises yoga without the guidance of a guru, psychic manifestations may arise and linger for some time. They are never permanent, and as the mind evolves these

powers will degenerate and the yogi will come down. So one should have a guru and leave everything to him. Instead of trying to develop psychic powers and taking the risk that you may wander from your higher goal, let your guru determine what you should have. If he wants to manifest psychic powers in you, he will do it. You need not determine what you should have.

What is shaktipat?

Shaktipat is the transference of a powerful experience. It is not the transmission of shakti, but an experience of shakti. It is given to the disciple to encourage him to follow the path. However, it is not possible to transfer this experience to every category of disciple, and in actual fact few are capable of receiving it.

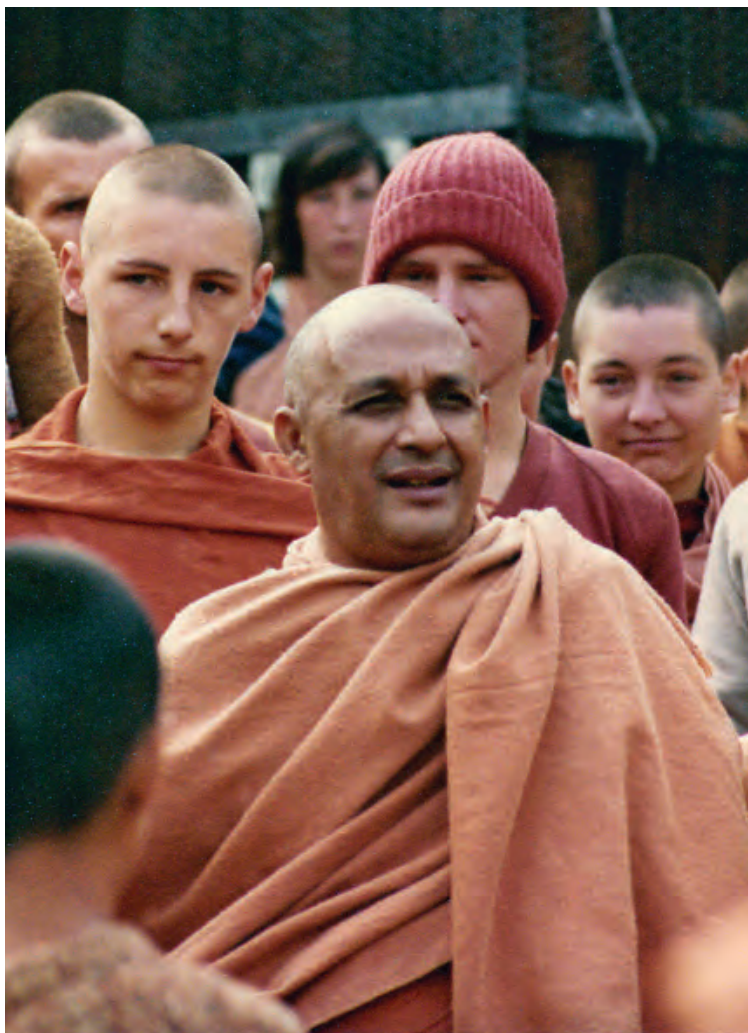
Shaktipat has been used by many gurus and saints throughout the ages. The early Christian saints, who were experts in shaktipat, used to create a positive samskara in the kings and rulers through shaktipat.

When I was a child, my parents took me to meet Anandamayi Ma, one of the greatest lady saints in India. Although she was only twenty-five then, she radiated spiritual energy, bliss and tranquillity. When she patted my back, my whole body emanated something which gave me a wonderful experience. This lasted for many months, but slowly it wore off, leaving only a memory. When I lost it, I had to start my journey once again.

If you wish to have this experience, you will have to find a guru who gives it, but remember that it is not a permanent affair. During the experience you will have spontaneous meditation, but in the course of time, as the intensity of the shaktipat wears off, you will find it necessary to revert to your old practices. Also, bear in mind that to ask a guru to give you an experience is like borrowing money. It is better not to borrow but to manage with what you have.

If you are able to give shaktipat, remember that your disciple only derives a small benefit. Those who have sat with

Ramana Maharshi could say what a fantastic experience it was being with him. All questions were answered and the mind became quiet in his presence, but the moment they were out of Tiruvannamalai they were the same old tail of the dog! So, instead of fixing the tail in bamboo, better to cut it off.



17

Mantra

I have tried many mantras and have become confused. How can I know which one I should persist with?

Well, the question could be put in a different way: “I have married so many times and nothing has succeeded.” You see, the first thing is to stay with one mantra and continue it. Don’t go changing the mantra. Don’t go on jumping from guru to guru. There is only one secret of success; stick to something. Even if you stick to a very ineffective system, it does not matter. Maybe you will reach a goal a little later, but you will reach it.

Don’t get fed up with the practice. If you are practising my system, persist with it and if you are practising some other system, you must stick to that. One guru, one practice, one mantra – that is known as spiritual chastity.

Remember the words ‘spiritual chastity’. Don’t go on with your old habits of flirting, or at least don’t project them into your spiritual life. In material life you may go from this husband to that husband; from this wife to that wife; from this job to that job; from this flat to that flat; from this country to another, and it may work out alright. But in spiritual life only one thing will work: one-pointed chastity of spiritual purpose.

What if the mantra has been practised for many years, but it still proves to be ineffective?

Mantra never fails. Even if it doesn’t bear fruit immediately, it will do its job in the course of time. Maybe some people

expect a little more than they should. They want very quick results, just like instant coffee, but mantra penetrates gradually. So continue using your mantra, but with conviction and sincerity. Even if it does not bring results in two or three years, don't be disheartened or discouraged. It took you fifteen years to grow a beard, and even if it takes a few more years for the mantra to take effect, it's worth it.

Are there some rules to obtain a mantra?

There are three ways in which a mantra can be obtained. The mantra can reveal itself to some psychic people. It can manifest in a dream or it can be given by a guru. A guru decides the mantra on the basis of your zodiac sign and the element which is pervading and dominating your personality. However, if there is an imbalance in your personality, he can give another mantra in order to combat the imbalance.

There is a specific science for determining mantras but not all gurus use it. Some are able to know the correct mantra intuitively. However, to give mantra is a great responsibility for a guru. Unless he has a thorough knowledge of the science and can see deep into the unconscious of the disciple, to give a mantra can be more of a danger than a benevolence.

What is the benefit of receiving a mantra directly from a guru?

When the mantra is heard from the guru, it is registered by your atman. Then it becomes the seed which grows as you practise your sadhana.

Is mantra diksha a form of initiation?

Mantra diksha is generally the first initiation into spiritual life. There are also further stages of initiation.

If you already have a guru, is it possible to receive a mantra from another guru?

According to my understanding, the guru has to be properly defined. If you have learned yoga from someone, he is your

yoga guru. If you have learned the *Bhagavad Gita* or the Bible from someone, he is your Gita or Bible guru. If you have been going to him for a long time and learning about spiritual life, then he is your spiritual guru. If he is a spiritually illumined person and you have great respect for him, he is also your guru. Accordingly, one can have many gurus, and the person who gives you a mantra is your mantra guru. Guru has two aspects: he teaches you, or he helps you to illumine your consciousness. So you can have these two aspects in one person or in many persons.

If a swami gives you a personal mantra through an agent and this mantra is also shared with another, does this reduce the power of the mantra for the first receiver?

When a mantra is given to a disciple and the disciple accepts the mantra, then he is the receiver. But if I tell you to go to a particular person and tell him that his mantra is *Om Namah Shivaya* then he is the receiver and not you.

What is the difference between a personal mantra and a general mantra?

Up to the point of initiation, you can practise any general mantra, but once you have been initiated into a mantra, this becomes your personal mantra and it should not be changed.

There are also special mantras which can be utilized for specific purposes such as influencing your destiny, or to overcome a specific problem. These mantras are discontinued as soon as they have fulfilled their purpose.

If there are universal mantras which are good for everyone, why have personal mantras?

A universal mantra is good for all, but because we have different temperaments, stages of evolution, needs of life and weaknesses of mind, we should have a personal mantra for some time. Throughout the world people have different eating habits. If I give you spicy Mexican food, you may not be able to eat it and

if you give me a Spanish meal, I may not be able to eat that. So we could establish a universal meal also, it's a good idea, but because we all have different nutritional requirements, eating habits and tastes, the plan would not succeed.

Om is a very powerful universal mantra, but if you give it to an emotionally unstable person, he will start having experiences immediately. He won't be able to face them and will think he's going crazy, so for him a longer personal mantra is more suitable. Universal mantras are for people like swamis who are evolving in spiritual life and are transcending the social barriers. All swamis have *Om* as their mantra because they have transcended certain barriers and are trying to come closer to reality.

So, we should start with a personal mantra, evolve ourselves and gradually come to a point where we transcend certain created definitions. Then we can discard the personal mantra and use a universal mantra.

How are mantras used therapeutically?

In the tantric system there are mantras which reduce snake and scorpion poison. There are also mantras which have a healing effect on certain diseases. These mantras have to be repeated by the practitioner for a certain period of time. Mantras that are intended for healing should be received and started on the day of an eclipse, either solar or lunar. From that day on the mantra is practised for a certain period of time according to the rules of the mantra.

It is also possible for a master who has attained mantra *siddhi* to use his mantra on those diseases which he is expert in.

What does mantra *siddhi* mean?

Mantra siddhi means that the sound waves, the patterns of the mantra, have become part of your inner body. We have three bodies – the gross body, the subtle body and the causal body. The mantra has to influence the three bodies and when it influences and awakens the third one, the causal body, this is called mantra *siddhi*.

What is the difference between a tantric mantra and a vedic mantra?

Tantric mantras are those which influence the deeper nature of the universe. They are also intended to fulfil certain desires. Tantric mantras are very powerful and when you practise them, they create a great force in the atmosphere.

Vedic mantras are intended for worship of the divine and for self-realization. They change the nature of a person and make him more devotional.

Is it necessary to pronounce the mantra correctly?

If you make a mistake in pronouncing the vedic mantras, there is no harm. For example, if you are repeating the mantra *Om Namah Shivaya* and you say *Om Namoh Shivaya*, it won't make much difference. But the tantric mantras must be pronounced absolutely precisely and correctly.

I have found that anyone who listens with awareness can produce the correct sound of the mantra. At first you may not be able to repeat the correct sound aloud, but you can perceive it. After hearing a melody several times, you can think it in your mind, even though you may not be able to sing it. In the same way, if you listen to the pronunciation of the mantra, even if you do not repeat it aloud, you will conceive the correct sound in your mind, and this is enough.

Is the meaning of the mantra important?

The mantra is a combination or assembly of powerful sound waves. As such, the intellectual understanding of the mantra is not at all necessary. It is not the meaning, but the sound waves created by the mantra which influence the cosmos in the brain and outside. There are some mantras which don't even have a meaning.

The mantra has two basic aspects: sound and form. For example, when you chant *Om*, it is a sound; when you write *Om* in script, it is a form. So every mantra has a sound and a form, but the most powerful aspect is the sound. All educated

people have a concept of script in their mind. If you are not educated and have no concept of script in your mind, then you will conceive *Om* as a sound only. The problem is you are not able to separate the sound from the script. If you repeat the sound *Om*, it is not only the sound, but also the script which follows it. When you are practising the mantra, gradually try to leave the idea of script and follow the sound.

Could one use the expression ‘Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me’ as a mantra for meditation? If so, how would one focus it?

There are three ways through which the realm of meditation can be entered. One way is by contemplating a gross object, and another is by concentrating on something subtle, like a chakra, mantra or inner sound. The third way is to have a prayer like you have mentioned, or a set of words such as ‘I am immortal’, and then fuse your mind on that. If your mind is restless, your method must be concentration on a gross object. If you have a comparatively quieter mind, you should concentrate on bindu, a chakra, a star or the like. But if you have full control over your mind and you can visualize your ideas, then you can take this prayer and become one with it.

How should the practice of mantra be integrated into the daily routine?

Practise for ten minutes early in the morning before everyone gets up and again at night just before you go to bed. Also, try to remember the mantra and repeat it mentally throughout the day, when you are at work or just sitting.

How important is regularity?

Mantra is so powerful that it can change your destiny, economic situation, physical structure, etc. If you want the mantra to change the whole structure of your life, you must practise it regularly, every morning and evening.

Can ladies practise mantra during menstruation?

There is nothing unhealthy about the menstrual period. Rather, if you understand it correctly and scientifically, then you will realize that it is a most important time for a woman when she can experience psychic awakening. During the menstrual period the hormones that flow in the woman's body stimulate her emotional personality, and this can be used very easily and effectively for psychic development. Therefore, women should particularly practise mantra during their menstrual period, even if they don't do it at any other time. Start your mantra practice two or three days before the period begins and continue up to three days after it ends.

In my opinion, a woman can also use a mala during the menstrual cycle. But if this goes against her belief or creates conflict, then she shouldn't do it. If the concept of impurity has embedded itself so deeply in her mind, it will be difficult to extricate it.

What is the correct way to pronounce Om?

Om is a combination of three sounds, 'A', 'U' and 'M'. However, the combination of 'A' and 'U' becomes 'O'. Thus the correct pronunciation is O-o-m-m-m.

Om can be chanted in different ways: short O and long M; long O and short M; equal O and M. We conducted a research study in Barcelona and found that when O was chanted, alpha waves were produced, and when M was chanted, there were theta waves. That means that when you chant *Om*, alpha and theta alternate and this alternation brings about a total quiescence in the mind.

We came to the conclusion that those people who have just been initiated into the practice should chant long O and short M. Practitioners who are more advanced should practise short O and long M, and those in between should equalize the O and M. However, what is more important than the way you choose to chant *Om* is that you are able to penetrate the vibration of *Om* into sushumna nadi. Then you will have an experience.

What is the purpose of chanting Om in groups?

Om chanting is done in groups to raise everyone at the same time. There are two types of Om chanting used for this purpose. One practice is where everybody chants *O-o-m-m-m* aloud together. The other is where everybody chants silently *Om, Om, Om*. The latter is a relaxed way of chanting used for chakra work. It allows you to chant independently in your own rhythm.

Why is it recommended to chant mantra aloud in the beginning?

Unless your mind is steady and one-pointed, mental repetition of mantra can bring more dissipation.

How does a mantra act scientifically?

Every sound and form has a different archetype inside the brain. The process of knowledge takes place through these archetypes. As I am talking to you, knowledge simultaneously takes place inside you, but this process is not based on the actual sounds I am pronouncing. As soon as the sound goes into the brain, it changes its waves and assumes various geometrical patterns. These patterns are the archetypes. Now in science, the principle is that perception and cognition take place inside through the intermediary archetypes, and what we perceive is not exactly as it was outside.

There are infinite archetype patterns. In yoga they are known as mandalas and yantras. Scientists have found that by producing certain sounds, certain flower-like shapes were formed. When certain mantras were chanted, they found that they created the archetype of a lotus flower. That is why the lotus is so common in spiritual literature. In the same way, different forms can be created by different mantras.

Sound is a force, and this force affects a certain part of the universe and creates ripples in the vast ocean of the cosmos. Just as electromagnetic or radio waves can't be heard even though they pass through the atmosphere, in the same way, a mantra has its own field by which it travels. In this universe

which we see around us, there are thousands of channels of waves. We call them layers or zones. In one layer, radioactivity travels, in another layer electromagnetic waves, in the third layer thought waves.

When you produce a sound, it attains a certain frequency. If your mind is concentrated, then the frequency is high; your mind is a part of the cosmic mind. But when your mind is not concentrated, then you are not in communication with the cosmic mind.

Are the vedic gods created by the archetypes of mantra?

Yes, in fact the gods and goddesses that we hear about in religion are only archetypes. Gods and goddesses like Shiva and Parvati are divine archetypes. In Sanskrit, these vedic deities are known as *devas*, meaning illuminations. When your mind is illumined, you can see so many things inside. Within this cosmos there are infinite forms. The human brain is a miniature universe, and whatever you see in the whole cosmos is contained inside. If you can illumine the inside, then you can know all about the outside.

Please explain the connection between the mantra and the breath.

The process of breathing utilizes prana shakti and the process of repeating a mantra utilizes manas shakti. When the mind and the breath are synchronized, there is balance between the two energies and the whole body becomes relaxed. Usually there is no connection between the breath and the mind; the breathing process is an independent function. But when you are aware of the breath, the process of breathing comes under the direct control of the mind.

What is anushthana and how is it practised?

Anushthana is a traditional practice in which a particular mantra is chanted. There are many kinds of anushthana but the two most important are sadhana anushthana and purascharana anushthana. Sadhana anushthana is done on all

nine days of Navaratri. During this time, simple, bland food is taken and no work is done.

Purascharana is a long anushthana in which the mantra is repeated as many hundreds of thousands of times as the number of mantras or letters it contains. For example, if the mantra is *Om Namah Shivaya*, it must be repeated 500,000 times; this means 5,000 malas. This can be completed in a short period of time or over a long period at your convenience. If you do not want to undertake the full number, then you can do half or a quarter. Anushthana is initiated on an auspicious day, for example, the day of an eclipse, when the number of mantras, and perhaps the duration of time is fixed and a *sankalpa*, or vow, is made to complete them. After many years of practice, the sound waves awaken the causal body. We call this *mantra siddhi*, the perfection of the power of mantra.



18

Yoga Nidra

What is the value of yoga nidra in regard to our daily tensions?

Practise it yourself and you will have the experience. In our day-to-day life we get tired, physically, mentally and emotionally. We develop muscular, emotional and mental tensions, and these tensions affect our nervous, coronary and digestive systems. By practising yoga nidra daily, these tensions can be eased or even eradicated completely.

Please tell us something about the actual practice of yoga nidra.

Yoga nidra is a practice which generally lasts for twenty to forty minutes. There are separate techniques for people suffering from hypertension and other problems, and for those who want to go deep into the spiritual side of yoga.

Yoga nidra is actually a very simple practice and you can learn it from a tape or recording. Before starting, choose a quiet room and close the windows and doors. Turn off the television or radio, loosen your collar and tie and switch on the tape recorder. Then lie down in shavasana and listen to whatever the voice is instructing. Go on following the instructions mentally. Do not concentrate, do not control your breath, just listen to the instructions and follow them mentally. The most important thing in yoga nidra is to refrain from sleep. If you sleep, you lose the awareness which you are aiming for in the practice.

What is the correct state in which to perform yoga nidra?

First of all you must direct yourself by listening to a tape or any instructing medium. Don't aim at going deep. That is the greatest mistake we make, not only in yoga nidra, but also in the system of meditation. Try to be very spontaneous, very relaxed and very much at peace with yourself. Even if the brain does not cooperate sometimes, this is not bad. Periodical distractions which come from time to time will help you in yoga nidra because they keep the awareness in a very alert condition and don't allow you to slip into slumber.

Why isn't it recommended to give the instructions of yoga nidra to yourself?

In order to give the instructions to yourself, the entire practice must be very clear in your mind so that you don't have to stop anywhere and try to remember what comes next. Otherwise you will strain yourself trying to remember the sequence of body rotation and the whole practice will lose its flow. Instead of achieving relaxation, you will become very tense. Therefore, in the beginning, it is much better to simply practise by following your teacher's voice or the instructions on a tape recording. Of course, after some time you will be able to practise the whole process unaided by any external agency. You will be able to initiate the instructions effortlessly and you will have no difficulty responding.

In yoga nidra can the student be influenced by the instructor?

Although yoga nidra is not a form of hypnotism, there can be some kind of association between the teacher and student. This is particularly so when it is used at the time of sleep. However, this problem can be avoided altogether by using taped instructions rather than personal instruction. A tape has no personality, no nature, neither good nor bad, so you cannot be influenced by the tape.

What is the difference between deep sleep and the psychic sleep one can experience through the practice of yoga nidra?

Yoga nidra means sleep with a trace of awareness; *nidra* means unconscious sleep. Everyone undergoes the state of yoga nidra each night before they go to sleep. It is a state of mind in between wakefulness and dream. At this time your consciousness is operating on both these levels, but it has no association with either of them. Within three minutes of lying down, children enter into this state of psychic sleep. Adults who have more problems and worries in their lives may take longer. Unless you are familiar with the practice of yoga nidra, this state remains for about three minutes before you slip into deep sleep.

Psychic sleep occurs at the threshold of sense consciousness and sleep consciousness. In yoga nidra we isolate the brain, we become introverted, but we maintain a degree of external awareness by listening to and mentally following a series of instructions. Otherwise what happens is that after the brain is isolated for some time, it becomes inactive as deep sleep supervenes. Then the yoga nidra state is lost as the awareness slips down into unconsciousness.

What is the difference between the brain waves in ordinary sleep and yoga nidra?

In Japan, Dr Hiroshi Motoyama has worked on different scientific experiments to determine how the brain waves differ in yoga nidra and normal sleep. During deep sleep he found that the brain waves register delta patterns, whereas in meditation they register alpha. He also found that in the practice of yoga nidra, beta and theta waves keep on alternating. This means that throughout the practice you are fluctuating between introversion and extroversion all the time. When you are extroverted your brain is excited, but when you are introverted your brain is free from any stimulus; it is relaxed. This alternation between beta and theta is the secret of yoga nidra.

What happens to the consciousness during yoga nidra?

During the practice of yoga nidra the consciousness is at different levels. Sometimes it is very close to the senses and at others, it is at a very remote distance. When the consciousness is at a remote distance, then it is only possible to understand through the auditory channels. During yoga nidra the consciousness is suspended for a few moments periodically, which means that it alternates between the subconscious and unconscious.

What is the difference between the state of mind achieved in yoga nidra and the state of mind achieved by hypnosis?

The state of mind achieved in yoga nidra is far beyond hypnosis, but it does pass through a hypnotic state. Through the practice of yoga nidra, you can transcend the barriers of your personality and consciousness. You can go to any depth or height, but at the same time you must know that when you are transcending, there is a point where you pass through the terrain of hypnotism.

Hypnosis covers a very small area of your personality. Scientifically speaking, when the central nervous system and the master cortex do not supply the needed stimuli to the brain, and when the brain is isolated, for a while it enters into a state which is called hypnosis. It is a momentary happening. It is a very small area or range of experience of the mind, especially when the brain and cerebral cortex is disassociated from both channels.

Now, you must already know that there are three important channels in this physical body. In yoga they are known as ida, pingala and sushumna. In other scientific terminology they are called the parasympathetic, the sympathetic and the central nervous systems. In the language of tantra and hatha yoga, we could say the mental force, the life force and the spiritual force. Here we will only use the words ida, pingala and sushumna.

Ida and pingala nadis feed the brain all the time with necessary stimuli. Then the brain is able to cognize an object,

a sound, an idea. If you close off ida and pingala by means of pratyahara, then the brain is isolated. That is hypnosis. But at the same time, if you awaken your sushumna, which is not awakened in most people, then, although you have closed the two channels of communication (ida and pingala), and you have disassociated them from the brain, the central nervous system is awake and, in place of ida and pingala, it will supply the necessary energy, stimuli and life to the brain.

What your brain is receiving now is through ida and pingala. What it lacks during hypnosis is the ida-pingala connection. But in yoga nidra the central nervous system, sushumna nadi, awakens the brain completely. During yoga nidra, because sushumna nadi is functioning, the brain receives a higher quality of stimuli and a different type of knowledge. Therefore, the kind of awareness one experiences is completely different from what one has at any other time. However, in hypnosis the brain is completely isolated from the sensory channels and therefore its knowledge is limited, its resources are conditioned and the brain is not able to function beyond its capacities. That is the fundamental difference between the states of awareness achieved through hypnosis and yoga nidra.

Are there any restrictions regarding yoga nidra?

Yoga nidra is good for people suffering from hypertension, myocardial infarction, insomnia or mental agitation, but it should not be done by epileptics or those suffering from psychotic depression.

People who work should first go to their room when they return to their home in the late afternoon, and close the curtains and door, loosen their clothing, lie down and practise yoga nidra for five to ten minutes. This will help them to relax and to make the transition between work and home with greater ease.

Yoga nidra should be practised in semi-darkness, not in total darkness or in bright light. Darkness and light have a powerful effect on the brain. In total darkness the mind tends

to sleep, while in bright light the mind is active. In order to maintain a state of relaxed awareness, a balance between introversion and extroversion (semi-darkness) is necessary.

Yoga nidra should be practised on an empty stomach. If you practise immediately after a heavy meal, it will interfere with the process of digestion. In yoga nidra the inner body temperature drops very fast. In meditation the temperature also drops, but it is more gradual. The inner body temperature is directly associated with the production of digestive juices. When the temperature falls rapidly, the secretion of these enzymes is greatly reduced. Those with a hyperacidic constitution can safely take a little tea, coffee, fruit juice, bread or biscuits before yoga nidra, but if your constitution is hypoacidic, it is much better not to take anything at all, not even tea.

During yoga nidra there is one thing you must be careful of, and that is not to fall into a deep slumber. In yoga nidra you separate the mind and watch the body, then separate the self, the *atma*, and watch the mind. This is a beautiful way of entering the deeper realms of life.

What is the best way to give yoga nidra to others?

When you teach yoga nidra, you should not stay on any one point for a long time. Move fast: right hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, etc. Keep on jumping from point to point. Don't allow any time for concentration or psychic images will come. Yoga nidra is not concentration. The images for visualization, like mango tree, rose flower, boat on a river, sandy beach and so on, should be precise and in rapid succession. When you give an extended visualization, such as walking in the park, the golden egg, a story, etc., the images should be adjusted in such a way that they serve as stepping stones to further concentration practices later on.

If you are teaching yoga nidra to children, don't tell them anything. Just give them inner visualization, distinct unassociated images in rapid succession, using numbers, colours, forms, flowers, trees, environmental scenes, or something imaginative.

This is actually the ultimate point in yoga nidra, and the purpose here is to check your perceptive capabilities.

If I say pink rose and you imagine how it looks, this means that your receptivity is keen. If I say pink rose and you try hard but you can't picture it, this means you have not yet come to the point of receptivity. If I say pink rose and you see the rose as a slight interpsychic vision, then you have gone too deep and have passed beyond the state of receptivity. In visualization, rapid sequence images retain the receptive state most effectively.

Can you practise yoga nidra sitting down?

Yoga nidra can be practised in a sitting posture and also while standing. However, the best position is *shavasana*, 'dead man's pose', in which you lie on your back. If you have a tendency to fall asleep very quickly in yoga nidra, then it is better to practise while standing.

When you practise yoga nidra and a great tension arises, what should you do, stop the practice, move, go to sleep or what?

When you feel any kind of tension during the practice of yoga nidra, on account of sickness or physical tightness, or due to some mental disturbances, you must always remember that this will not be a permanent experience in yoga nidra. It might be in a few sessions, or it may be a very regular or infrequent feature. In any case, you should continue with your practice; the next session is likely to be better. However, if during that particular yoga nidra the restlessness grows, there is no harm in moving your body to adjust your position, or you can even sleep a little.

How are you able to correct bad habits or attitudes in yoga nidra?

Yoga nidra is a method by which you can influence your mind. If you are addicted to a certain bad habit which you cannot eliminate, at a particular stage in the practice, through the

power of suggestion, you can make the mind follow your orders. If you practise daily, within a period of ten to twenty days, you will be free of that bad habit.

Yoga nidra can also be used to influence small children up to the age of ten. When they are at the borderline state between sleep and wakefulness, you can suggest certain new behavioural patterns for them to follow. The threshold state just before the appearance of delta waves or deep sleep is very receptive. If you want to stop a child from bedwetting, for example, the impression of urinating in the toilet rather than in the bed has to be firmly fixed in their mind during this state. The child should hear, but at the same time he should not be consciously aware of what you are telling him. The brain registers the impression at a subconscious level and from there it works on the consciousness in a more powerful way.

Isn't this a type of brainwashing?

Brainwashing is a method which was designed for political blackmailing. If you call yoga nidra brainwashing, then I think there is nothing in this world that isn't brainwashing. What are television, radio, advertisements, newspapers, magazines and novels doing to our brains every minute of the day? It is really very good if the brain is washed with something clean.

In the receptive state created by yoga nidra we are able to correct the negative patterns already existing in the brain. Take a girl suffering from a fear psychosis. Doctors have tried all methods to treat her but have failed. If you are able to resolve her fears by injecting one simple idea into her mind, is this brainwashing? Perhaps, but in a positive sense.

In yoga we are taught to follow the path of knowledge, where we experience the pain, the sorrow, the agony, and then transcend it. This is the best way, but is everybody capable of understanding and transcending their pain? For those who are not, this way of brainwashing is useful. After all, everybody is brainwashing themselves all the time anyway. How to stop it? You don't have the awareness to stop it, even if you wanted to. You can only do it in samadhi perhaps, but not before.

What is the power of sankalpa and how is it used?

Sankalpa is a resolution one makes in one's mind. The mind is full of waves, storms and winds. These are the desires which are constantly crossing the mind. They are so plentiful that it is not possible to record them all. If you desire throughout your life, there comes a moment when you realize that desires can never be fulfilled. The mere fact that you could not fulfil all your desires proves that the mind is very weak. Either one should not desire, or if one does, one should be able to fulfil that desire. Yet neither way is possible, the mind is not devoid of desire, nor are we able to fulfil every desire. What does this indicate? It means that the mind is weak, the willpower is weak and the aim is wrong. Therefore, in yoga there is a system called sankalpa.

Sankalpa is not desiring, it is a centralized theme of resolution. The purpose of sankalpa is not to fulfil one or two or even a few desires. The aim is to create strength in the structure of the mind. You can even say that sankalpa is the force of will.

Sankalpa is an idea which is like a seed you sow in the bed of your mind. When the mind is clear, the sankalpa grows very well. If you have prepared properly by removing all the weeds and applying manure and fertilizer before planting the seed, it is sure to germinate and grow into a strong plant. When you practise yoga nidra, you nurture your sankalpa by repeating it near the beginning and end of the practice. In the course of time, when the sankalpa grows and becomes powerful, you can find the fulfilment of many of your personal desires, not only in spiritual life, but in the totality of life itself. It is not enough only to know how to desire; it is also necessary to have the power to fulfil your desires. Eventually, the sankalpa becomes the directing force in your life, and when there is a directing force in life, then life becomes successful, fruitful and rich.

How do you formulate the sankalpa?

Sankalpa is a very powerful instrument in the hands of man. A sankalpa should only be made when one understands its

real purpose and meaning. In the beginning most people do not know what sankalpa is or which sankalpa they should make. Therefore, they should wait until their understanding develops.

Sankalpa can create a direction for your whole life if you use it wisely. Although you can use it for the eradication of smoking or drinking, if you do so, you are really misusing it. This is something like shooting a rifle at a fly. The purpose of sankalpa is to influence and transform the whole life pattern, not only the body but also the mind, the emotions and the spiritual forces. Then if you are a heavy smoker or drinker, you will automatically give it up. When sankalpa becomes the directing force in life, then life becomes powerful.

Experiments have been made using yoga nidra for out-of-body experiences. Is this also an aim of yoga nidra?

In yoga nidra, if you can remain awake and if you are able to cut off your external awareness but intensify your internal awareness, and at the same time you can keep your mind moving, then you can try to go outside. Why not? But be sure that you can bring yourself back inside again.

Such experiences are possible, but they are not the aim. Yoga nidra is a practice by which you can awaken your consciousness and separate it from external awareness and from sleep. Then the consciousness becomes powerful and you can apply it in any way you like. You can develop the memory, increase knowledge, do astral travelling, transform your nature, and eliminate many vicious habits of thinking and living. The aim of yoga nidra depends mostly on the practitioner.

Is yoga nidra effective in cases of mental disease?

When people are mentally ill, they can have many different grades of illness. As long as they are able to react and respond to the teacher's instructions, then yoga nidra will help them, but when they are in deep catatonic states and are not responding to the external stimuli or environment, it is not possible to reach them. I have tried the artificial respiration

pranayama first, supplemented by change of diet, irrigation of the bowels and talking to the patient when he goes to bed. There are certain moments when he is able to receive and respond. It is difficult to say when. You will try to reach him for a month or two and he may receive and respond only twice or thrice, but that alone has a tremendous effect.



19

Sleep and Dreams

Is it necessary to have a certain number of hours of sleep?

You should have six to eight hours maximum. If a person practises meditation or pranayama, or attends satsang, then six hours sleep is sufficient, for he can adjust his tensions through these things. However, for those who do not follow any type of spiritual discipline, and for those whose minds are overloaded by thoughts of their business, property, profit and loss, etc., a little more sleep is necessary.

There are three types of tension, muscular, mental and emotional, and it takes time to release these tensions, as the body tends to produce toxins even during deep sleep. However, six to eight hours of sleep is sufficient for someone involved in spiritual practices. And for those who are able to rid themselves of tensions, or who are not affected by them, four or five hours of sleep is enough.

Actually, sleep is a condition that should be dealt with on a personal basis. There cannot be a fixed rule. Generally, people sleep at night, but depending on personal habits or obligations, you can sleep in the day and work at night. There are many people such as scientists, inventors, musicians and writers who sleep during the day and work at night.

What is the best position for sleeping?

I will explain the correct way to sleep. When you go to bed, sit up calmly, close your eyes, concentrate on the breath or

on anahata chakra, the heart centre, for a few minutes. If you like, you can take your mala and repeat your mantra mentally. If you feel drowsy, put down your mala and lie down on your left side. When you feel you are about to fall asleep, turn onto your right side. This is the most wonderful and the most scientific way of sleeping. When you sleep, delta waves are predominant, and when you meditate, it is the alpha waves. Alpha waves should precede the delta waves.

Which kind of pranic phenomena take place in our central nervous system during sleep?

When you are asleep the pranas are brought down, in certain cases to vishuddhi and in other cases to anahata, and accordingly there is the experience of dream or complete unconsciousness. In those who are highly evolved, the prana rests not in vishuddhi or anahata, but in sahasrara during deep sleep, and ajna during dream and vision. The entire pranic consciousness withdraws itself from all sources of the body and is almost paralyzed or disconnected.

Would you please explain sleepwalking?

When you sleep, the mind withdraws itself and undergoes a state of transformation. The senses and the body are detached from the mind and do not function in deep sleep. But when the mind is not completely withdrawn, a part of the mind sometimes remains attached to the body and the senses, so people get up and move around.

I have seen quite a few cases of somnambulism. Once a man came to me about midnight and wanted my permission to leave the ashram. He seemed very disturbed and I told him he could go. The next morning, he returned and narrated that he had gone to sleep in the ashram and when he woke up, he found himself at the railway station. He knew nothing about the time from the moment he went to sleep until he woke up with a ticket in his hand. In the state of deep sleep, many children speak, make movements, and even urinate. People

go to the bathroom, leave their watch there and go back to sleep. Next morning, they search for the watch and wonder how it got into the bathroom. This happens to most of us, but we don't take note of it. It means that during deep sleep, the mind is not completely detached; the physical functions and mental control still exist. When this association is more real, one starts walking in one's sleep, but the coordination between the mind, senses and body is not complete at that time, so an accident can easily occur. In order to function properly, there must be coordination between the mind, the senses and the body, and this coordination is absent during deep sleep.

Some psychic mediums enter a trance state during deep sleep and they are still able to speak. For hours together, they go on making predictions and prophecies, and some of them dance. This is a controlled state of somnambulism. It can give us an idea as to how to train the mind, so that when we intentionally enter into the state of trance and deep sleep, we can utilize this trained mind, which can make the body walk and speak without personal knowledge of what is happening. When the mind is able to function without the interference of the body, it becomes very psychic and capable. Those people who make predictions in a state of trance, first separate the body and mind, keeping one of the senses, say speech, connected with the mind. Their inner mind and speech are in coordination, but nothing else. You ask them something and they go on speaking although their body is asleep.

You may have heard of Edgar Cayce, 'the sleeping prophet'. He used to talk about world events and make prophecies during his sleep. His sleeping speeches were recorded, and now we can see that many of his predictions have come true. We can develop our mind in such a way that we can make our intuition function during that state of trance. Sleep can be transformed into trance and untrained somnambulistic behaviour can be transformed into psychic or intuitive behaviour.

Could you speak on the subject of dreams and their relationship to our spiritual evolution?

Everybody dreams and you know that some people dream fantastic things. The quality of one's dreams is very much dependent on the quality of one's mind and thinking. If you have an unstable mind, then you will have unstable dreams. If you have a mind which is completely dissipated and broken, then you will have similar dreams. And as you make progress in spiritual life and the mind becomes concentrated and one-pointed, the dreams are vivid, clear and meaningful.

Dreams belong to the psychic body, *vijnanamaya kosha*. They are not related to the physical, the pranic or the mental body. Dreams belong to a different sphere of man's experience, but are greatly influenced by his external personality, because whatever we experience in our day-to-day life is turned into a seed. That seed is stored in the karmic body, the causal body, and is impossible to remove.

The experiences you had in your previous life, or even when you were a baby, can't be recalled because they have gone back into the causal body and they are stored there in a different form altogether. You may easily call them archetypes, and there are millions of them. Every desire, every knowledge and every experience has its own formation. And these formations are numerous, but they are so tiny that in this causal body, which is formless, millions and millions of samskaras are stored.

During the period of dream, depending on the possibility of manifestation, they come out. Therefore, dream is a state of experience. You call them dreams, but in yoga they are not known as such. The word used for dream is self-experience, and whatever you see in a dream is what is in you. Dreams give you knowledge of what is in store.

Another important point is that dream is a process in which some of the karmas are released in a different sphere of existence. Many karmas are spent by this life process as we are involved here. Others are exhausted by a process of thinking in which we are involved. And many karmas are spent

through the process of dream, or they are exhausted during the process of dharana, when you have visions. They are not dreams or imaginations; they are expressions of something that is already within you.

Now, in order to have high quality dreams which are tangible, meaningful, systematic and methodical, it is necessary that the vehicle be reorganized. In order to reorganize the whole tool of experience you must stabilize the mind. If you have myopia, your vision is blurred; if you have cataract, you can't see things. In the same way, if the mind is not properly organized, and if it is affected by emotions and other occurrences, the petals are broken, just as glass is broken. And whatever is reflected in that broken petal of the mind is completely mutilated. So dreams are true, but they are distorted. In order to avoid this distortion, stability of mind has to be achieved.

Can dreams help us to understand the mind?

The science of dreams is very important in order to know the hidden part of the mind. Dreams occur on account of a disturbance, awakening, or explosion in the psychic energy levels. When the intellectual and material barriers are removed, symbols, colours and sounds from the psychic realms are revealed. These are the archetypes. The process of knowledge takes place through these archetypes, which form our inner programming. According to modern psychology, everything in the cosmos is contained within the mind in archetypal form. These archetypes are suppressed in our being. They have to be exposed so that we can know what we are. One of the best ways of doing this is through the symbols revealed in dream.

Is it helpful to write down dreams?

Dreams are stages of experience and they are also symbols of premonition. Dreams are the language of condensed deeper thinking, and no dream is futile or meaningless. However, the dreamer must study his dreams thoroughly if he wants to

interpret them correctly. He must record his dreams for some years to gain a complete and thorough understanding of them. Every three or four months he should read over them and try to relate the dreams to the events that have taken place in his life. Then he will discover the language of his dreams.

Is the time barrier transcended in dream?

Actually, past, present and future are only categories of this mind. In reality, this division does not exist. In dreams, these categories are broken down. The mind can still sense the time/space continuum, but it is able to grasp a greater area of time in one glance.

There is a mechanism in the human mind which can monitor the brain and command the mind to go back into the past or the future. But this process of monitoring happens involuntarily, and generally people do not know how to initiate it voluntarily. This mechanism has been investigated scientifically, and in yoga we call it the *ajna chakra*. The meaning of *ajna* is 'command' or 'monitoring'.

There was a scientific investigation into this phenomenon and I can give you a resume of the experiment. The subject was put to sleep by inducing delta waves. When delta waves are intensified in the brain, you sleep. Then the monitoring centre was controlled by some sophisticated scientific instruments and the subject's mind jumped back into the past, perhaps a thousand years. Then his mind jumped into the far future. Now, what the person said about the distant past and the far future could not be verified, but when his mind was monitored to traverse a recent path, it was possible to correlate the facts. In this state the human mind can travel into the future or the past of time and space. Sometimes this happens in dreams as a natural event, but it does not happen all the time.

Why do we forget our dreams?

Often, when you wake up in the morning, you remember a dream very clearly, but the moment you get out of your bed,

you forget it completely. This indicates the difference in the states of consciousness. Often you dream but you don't remember it until the dream is about to happen, is happening or has happened. This means that the two states of mind, the dream state and the waking state, have absolutely no communication with each other. In order to create a link of communication between the two states of mind, you should note down every dream as soon as you recall it. In the course of months or years you will be able to interpret the language of your dreams.

How can we have more meaningful dreams?

The dreams which follow sound sleep are mostly in order and correct. Therefore, it is best to find a yogic way of sound sleep. Then you will have very significant dreams.

The condition of the stomach has a strong influence on the dream process. At night, if your stomach is disturbed, if there is a lot of wind and gas, then the sleep will not be deep. The dreams that come during that condition of sleep are dissipated, scattered, broken and unsystematic. In order to have more meaningful and easily interpreted dreams, you must sleep with your stomach in an absolutely smooth condition.

There are people who can sleep very well with an empty stomach; these people are sattvic by temperament. There are people who cannot sleep with an empty stomach, they need something in it; these people are rajasic in nature. Then there are people who can only sleep with an overloaded stomach; these people are tamasic. Tamasic people will have destructive dreams, rajasic people will have symbolic dreams and sattvic people will have exact dreams.

The nature of the mind also plays a very important part in dreams. There are people who jump from one thought to another like a monkey, and there are people who know how to think. When these people enter into dreams, they project their mental conditions. On account of mental incompetence, dreams come in very distorted forms. Many times, even in dreams there are traces of inhibition, then the dreams come

in symbolic form. When the mind is completely free, the dreams are exact projections of one's personality, mind and inner space.

Dream is a form of awareness. It is a *vritti*, a pattern of mind. This means that the mind undergoes a state of transformation in the form of dreams. If you remain a witness to this dream consciousness, then you are able to complete one aspect of pratyahara. Witnessing the dream is the dynamic form of pratyahara, not the hypnotic form.

At a certain stage of pratyahara, the energy level is exploded and when this happens, you have certain experiences. These experiences manifest from the contents of your mind, just as dreams come out of the contents of your own mind. So the same objective is easily fulfilled by practising pratyahara. The difference is the level of awareness. Usually what happens when you dream is that the awareness is gross and incapable. Therefore, many people have dreams but they can't remember them. The witnessing consciousness of the dream should be alert, only then is it possible to visualize the dream clearly.

Is it possible to gain control over the dream process?

When you have reached a certain stage in spiritual life, you should also be able to control your dreams. The dreams come on their own, but in the middle of the dream you can change it and create your own dream. For this you must be able to maintain the consciousness of the dreamer and the dream, so that while you are dreaming you know that you are dreaming.

One night many years ago, when I was living with my guru, I had a wonderful dream. I remember it as if it were last night. In the dream I was lying on the bank of the Ganga. It was a black, still night and stars studded the sky. Every part of the dream was very brilliant. Then I thought in my mind, "Oh, I'm dreaming! Now, let me see if I can withdraw this dream." I could see my hands in the dream. So I looked at them and the dark night vanished, but I knew that I was still dreaming.

So, I thought, “Now I will see if I can do it again.” I brought my fingers into the dream and the same vision reappeared – dark night, sky brilliantly studded with stars. Everything was beautiful and tranquil.

Then I thought, “I want to withdraw this experience and have another. I want to see the full moon.” Again I tried. Then the darkness was illumined by a bright moon and the stars were all overshadowed by the moonlight. I looked at it. The scene was very peaceful. Then I thought, “I will withdraw it again.” Every time I tried it, I could come out of that experience. This time I thought I’d like to see the sun, not the midday sun but the rising sun. So I looked and there was an apple coloured sun over the horizon.

I withdrew it and thought, “Well, I have had two starlit nights, one moonlit night and one rising sun at dawn. Now I can hold, change, withdraw or impose my vision because I am controlling the movement of my consciousness.” I came out of the dream and wrote about this experience in my diary.

The next morning I went to my guru, Swami Sivananda, about some typing matters, and he asked, “Can you create a dream and destroy it?” I answered, “Yes.” He said, “Well, you can start meditation now.” From this you can understand at what level you must enter meditation and to what extent you must be able to control the mental manifestations if you want to go very far and very deep.

How much do we dream?

Dreaming is what I call energy patterns, and man dreams even when he is awake. We are dreaming now, but we don’t know this because our sensory functions are extroverted. If you stop your sensory functions, you will start to witness the dreams. I don’t know about animals, but I know that the psyche of man is dreaming all the time, twenty-four hours a day, consciously as well as unconsciously. The dreams which we have at night are only a small part of it. Maybe if we were a little more conscious at that time, we would see the dream process.

I have thought for many years about the level of animal consciousness and I have tried to imagine in my own way, but not with any scientific proof, how an animal dreams. When I see an animal sitting quietly or sleeping, somehow it comes to me that they dream all the time too. They are rooted in a state of dream consciousness.

When I see a little baby just out of the mother's womb, I try to assess the quantum of its consciousness, and I have found that up to a certain state, a baby is dreaming. He is conscious; he is in a world of his own, with his own level of experience. Similarly, all animals have a level of experience. The dream state is present within both animals and newborn babies, but it is functioning on a level which is not sensory. Gradually, in the case of the human baby, the consciousness leaves the dream level and unites with the sensory level.

Remember that we are dreaming constantly and have been doing so for millions of years. Somehow we have to get out it. You asked about the importance of dreams, but I want to stress the importance of renouncing the dream. We have to get out of that spontaneous occurrence of dream consciousness and raise our level of consciousness.

I suffer from many restless dreams and nightmares. What does it mean and what can I do about it?

Dreams are a natural expression and outlet, but in order to make this release more effective you should practise the technique called *trataka* before going to bed. Use either a candle flame or a small dot and practise for about ten minutes, then go to bed.

First lie on your left side for about five minutes and then turn onto the right side. While doing this, maintain one-pointed awareness of your natural breath. Then, repeat mentally, "I am breathing in, I am breathing out; I know that I am breathing in, I know that I am breathing out." You will go to sleep and your dreams will be in perfect order because the release will take place in a relaxed fashion.

I will give you an example. If your stomach is constipated and you take a purgative, what happens? The purging is sudden and forceful, but if you take fruit juice or a lemon, then the purging doesn't happen. There is only relaxation. If you take neither purgative nor fruit, what will happen? The constipated stomach will sooner or later create gases, acid, bile and so on, and create a kind of diarrhoea. Diarrhoea is also a release in the same way that purging and relaxation are a release, but which of the three is best? Relaxation of course. Now, in the same way, when you are dreaming strange things, that's the release, but in the opinion of yogis, the release or the relaxation of the suppressed principle of the mind should take place in such a way that the mind is not tormented by it later on, nor disturbed during the dream.

Do realized souls have dreams?

No, they have one state of being. They don't alter. For them, waking and dreaming are the same. They are always in a spiritual state.



20

Children

I would like to know why so many swamis have a childlike quality about them.

In yoga there is a formula: you may increase in age, you may acquire any amount of knowledge, but there is some part of the personality which should always remain childlike. Therefore, in yoga, concentration on ajna chakra is practised. Ajna chakra is the pineal gland and, while it continues to function, you remain childlike. In most people the pineal starts to degenerate after the age of eight, but it is possible to keep this gland active by concentrating on ajna chakra.

If you are seventy-five, and your ajna chakra or pineal gland is still healthy, then simultaneously you will be an adult of seventy-five and a child of eight. Almost all geniuses have the personality of a child and the body of a grown-up, and therefore they are able to keep in contact with the higher sphere.

At what age should children start yoga classes?

At the age of eight, teach them surya namaskara, mantra and pranayama. These three practices should be continued for several years until the signs of puberty appear. Then change the practices and give them more asanas and pranayama. If a child starts these three practices at the age of eight, puberty will naturally be delayed for two or three years. Usually puberty takes place between twelve and fourteen, and is established

between fourteen and sixteen. But if the child practises yoga, puberty will start at fourteen and be established at eighteen. When the signs of puberty appear, the child can take up all major asanas.

Meditation techniques should be taught after the age of twenty-one. This applies to those children who have been practising yoga from the age of eight. Up to the age of twenty-one they should use the simple methods of meditation, such as kirtan, chanting and visualization.

I thought that these practices were only given to boys. Can girls also do them?

It is not correct to say that these practices were not meant for girls. In the vedic age, both boys and girls were initiated into sandhya and Gayatri. It was only later, during the period of our cultural decadence that this amendment was made.

Are mantras and music helpful for children?

Well, relaxing the brain through mantra is one of the methods of increasing perception, but yantra is a more direct method because it is not a process of relaxing, it is a process of awakening. Some systems give music to children to help them relax. This is not bad, but it creates a particular amount of inactivity. Most music makes the mind inactive, although some types of music make it expressive and other types are very awakening for children. Visualization of yantra is a totally dynamic, activating method. When you practise awareness of the yantra, your mind is continually generating higher wave patterns; it is never regressing. Concentration on a particular yantra stimulates a similar archetype in the brain, which creates an awakening at a higher level.

So our efforts should keep the process of awakening active in the brain. I know music and I like it, but it tends to make the mind inactive. Inactivity cannot be the objective of yoga, especially when the purpose is to awaken the potentialities in the child. Every practice we teach to children should create a movement or an event of awakening in them.

This doesn't mean that music is not included in the scheme of yoga. If music is practised correctly, it stimulates its own archetypes in the brain. It can create a gradual awakening in the structure. But first we have to define what we mean by music. If the music is unsystematic or sexually stimulating, we do not know what it will do.

Is it good for a child of two to learn mantra?

No. It is better that you don't teach the child yet, but instead, you yourself practise those things you would like the child to learn. If you are chanting the Upanishads, practising mantra or meditation, and getting up at four or five am each day, the child will imbibe all these positive habits because he is like a photo camera.

Children are definitely influenced by the structure of their environment and the personalities surrounding them. If you cry, shout and scream, what can you teach your children? If you are nervous, depressed and easily excited, what example do you set for your children? Those things you wish to teach your children are what you are badly lacking yourself. Therefore, the best thing to do is to live the way you would like your children to live and they will imbibe your lifestyle.

How much yoga should be imparted to children, or should it all be left to their own choice?

If you are going to leave yoga to their choice then you should leave everything to their choice. Children are pliable, innocent and devoted. They believe in higher realities but they need proper training. It is better to give them an education in spiritual life, discipline and yoga from the very beginning.

When both parents and children follow discipline and a regular lifestyle, it will ultimately reflect in the behaviour and personality of a nation. Your nation, government and family are your pride and that pride is discipline. All the achievements of America, Germany, Russia or China have been brought about through discipline. The first yoga sutra

of Patanjali is: *Atha yoga anushasanam*, which means yoga is discipline. It doesn't even say yoga is practice.

Give your children discipline but only little by little. If you press a pencil too hard, the lead will break. Give your children discipline in the light of a spiritual and yogic education.

What can we do to counteract the bad influences on children?

Family life has a great influence on the child. So the first thing that must be done is to reintegrate family culture. The family structure has been undergoing a process of disintegration for the last twenty years, but now we must stop it and start emphasizing the correct family life. The greatest corrective influence on children is other children. If a child is wrong and other children tell him so, the child will think about it, but if parents tell him the same thing, he will not care. So we must have the correct system in the family.

Secondly, the schools need some sort of reorientation. In India we have the gurukul system. Children live in ashrams with the guru for several years. They are far from the city and the children manage the whole school themselves. They wake up early, have their morning bath and prayers and perform their exercises and duties.

Are there any general rules in yoga for bringing up children?

Parents worry too much about their children. Children must be left with other children; they must be left to grow on their own. The duty of the parents is to take care of them as long as they are innocent, so that they don't get into trouble. I have seen myself and most of you will agree that parents worry so much about their children that the children go wrong.

How should parents encourage good habits and discourage the bad?

You must set an example, and the children will follow it. When the child is in the womb, you can train him there,

rather than trying to change and brainwash him when he is born. Life in the womb is more powerful and more receptive because you can change the entire structure of the DNA molecules.

How should we bring up children so they don't become egoistic and aggressive?

Children should not be suppressed. The personality must grow, the ego must develop, but you can create a way for their spiritual advancement. That you can do either by living a spiritual life yourself or else letting them follow their own nature without any obstruction from your side. We should not try to force or to build children in our own patterns, or to modify their personalities. They must follow their own nature.

Do you support students taking part in politics?

Youth power is dissipated by politicians. Dabbling in politics will do more harm than good. Even in the olden days young people were exploited by corrupt and influential political leaders. Students should be led along the right path by the educated. The system of education should be reorientated and backed by mature principles.

When should yoga be integrated into the school curriculum?

Yoga can be taught in easily understandable terms from class five to university level, step by step, by teachers who have made a thorough study of the subject and have undergone special training.

Along what lines should the educational system be reoriented?

The school system should be based on self-discipline rather than the enforcement of outer discipline. This requires that the teacher imbibes the yogic philosophy in order to increase his own inner power and thereby inspire discipline in others. This is more effective and lasting.

How can yoga help the restless youth of today?

Young people must have contact with yoga. They will attain peace through yoga and spread it throughout the world. The intelligent youth of today have no spiritual mooring, guru or religion. That is why they become hippies, that is why they smoke marijuana and take LSD. They want to discover the truth, but society has not been able to supply them with a way. For the last 150 years, there has been spiritual regression in society. When yoga comes, society will progress. Thousands and thousands of boys and girls will have a practical way of life and they will learn how to follow the path of truth. If children don't want to go to church or the temple, let them meditate. If they have no faith in the outside, they must have faith in the inside. For the children of today and the civilization of tomorrow, yoga is an epoch-making philosophy.

Do you agree that the poor quality of students is due to the poor quality of the teachers?

I do agree, but the poor quality of students may also be attributed to the poor quality of the parents. It may be due to degeneration in genetics, poor environment, the way children are brought up, the lack of respect and understanding they receive, etc. All these factors count.

Can yoga help juvenile delinquents?

This is a very important topic. Why do children start behaving antisocially and committing all sorts of crimes and aggressive acts? There are many reasons given by different people, but I have my own theory. You see, at the age of seven or eight years, the pineal body begins to decay and, with that, a major controlling lock upon the function of the pituitary body is released. When this control is released, the pituitary hormones begin to form and enter the bloodstream. Aggressive, antisocial and delinquent behaviour, which regulate the onset of puberty and sexual activity, can arise at any time after the pineal body has begun this process of decay. However, so long as the pineal body is kept healthy and not allowed to

decay, this dawning sexual consciousness which follows the release of pituitary hormones will be delayed.

Nowadays, as children grow up, their pineal body begins to decay and their pituitary body begins to develop automatically. As a result they have high levels of different disturbing hormones in their blood, which influence the different glands and the nervous system, finally affecting their behaviour. This causes an imbalance between their mental and vital fields. 'Vital' means prana; the bioenergy, and 'mental' means mind. The pranic and mental fields are unable to coordinate with each other and glands such as the thyroid and adrenals do not work in absolute coordination with each other.

The sex secretions usually start proceeding from the body after a certain point of physical maturity. Nowadays they start earlier, before the child possesses the mental and emotional stability to cope with such powerful hormonal drives. In these cases the children start developing different types of ideas which do not find any control or counterbalance.

Every individual has within him a controlling factor. If you want to murder someone, you think about it, but after some time another thought comes which opposes the previous one. There is always a conflict, and this is called a control. It is a measure of maturity. If you want to drink poison in order to commit suicide, at the same time you think, "No", then "Yes", and "No" again, and it continues like this. This does not happen with some of these children who get a single idea and hang onto it indiscriminately. They ignore the shakti of *viveka*, discrimination. There is no power of discrimination because physical, hormonal and mental maturity are yet to be developed.

The adrenal glands are very important and have a wide range of influence on the human body. The thyroid gland is also a very significant gland which plays an important role in the emotions of human life, like fear and love. If there is an imbalance in these glands, what is going to happen to the children? Their behaviour is affected by the disordered development of these glands.

In yoga the first thing to be done is to keep the pineal body healthy for as long as possible. As long as your pineal body is healthy, your sexual glands will remain under control. As long as the sex glands remain under control there will not be a toxic effect in the body, because the sex glands produce those particular secretions which are toxic in nature. They can create physical diseases and even insanity. That is why there is a system of marriage, because through that system you are able to get these toxic secretions out of the physical body harmlessly, and we are all the products of these toxins.

If you develop these secretions at a very tender age, when you have not developed intellectual, emotional and physical maturity, what will happen to your mental balance? Just imagine if a boy of twelve is able to know as much as I know. What will be the state of his mental balance? There will be no coordination or balance between the physical, mental and emotional factors during the tender years when the pineal body is destroyed. As such, many children become juvenile delinquents.

In order to avoid this problem, in ancient India children were initiated into three particular yoga practices at the age of seven or eight. One practice was surya namaskara and the other two were pranayama and Gayatri mantra. Nowadays this tradition continues with the sacred thread ceremony, but unfortunately few people understand the meaning and importance of the initiation. They think it is no more than a social ritual and do not take it seriously.

However, these are the yogic practices which should be taught to children at the age when the pineal gland starts to deteriorate, so they can stay balanced with these disturbing factors within their developing bodies.

21

Evolution

Is it possible to compare the belief of the golden age or Satya yuga with the scientific theory that man has evolved from animals and that evolution is moving forward?

There are many theories on this subject, but the ultimate one is the theory of man's natural evolution. Man has evolved from a small, tiny shell. I say this, keeping both modern science and the Samkhya system of evolution in mind. Creation is a manifestation of reality; matter is an expression of energy, and in matter continuous evolution is taking place. The ether, water, fire, air and earth elements evolved in gradual succession, and thus the different strata of creation began.

Life is an expression of the deeper core of matter. From energy came matter, from matter came life, and the ultimate evolution of life is the expression of energy or *shakti*.

How do you reconcile the apparent contradiction that we are entering into Kali yuga, the so-called age of darkness, and yet awareness of spiritual realities appears to be growing?

I have never described Kali yuga as an age of darkness. I don't believe that man has degenerated or that this will be the last chapter of human history. Man is evolving, and during the course of evolution much confusion has taken place. The great mess which people are now aware of is not due to

degeneration; it is due to a process of cleansing the whole structure of mankind.

I believe that in the age we are entering, man is becoming more and more intellectual, more aware of his hatred and jealousies and also of the finer human sentiments and aspirations. At this time he is undergoing a state of terrible conflict in his mind. There is enormous conflict between the different sides or shades of each individual's personality when he is not able to settle himself at one point. He is torn between the two. It is the age of conflict between the different shades of individual personality. This is not the dark age; it is the age when the sensitive mind has become receptive to both sides at the same time.

If I have opened my eyes after a long blindness and I can now see a flower, then I can also see something dirty as well. One causes repulsion and the other causes a pleasant sensation. This is where man stands today. This is why I believe Kali yuga is the age of yoga and inner spiritual evolution.

It may be from the viewpoint of religious people that Kali yuga is the dark age, but from the point of view of spiritual regeneration, it is the best period in human history. Never before has man voluntarily dedicated himself to spiritual life. For many, many centuries, man has been influenced by traditions and cults led by very powerful people, but only in the present times is man beginning to discover his own self. People of all ages are trying to discover their own nucleus. We don't belong to the time when thousands of people were declared to belong to a certain religion which they may not have understood or wanted. We hear in history that thousands became Muslims, Christians, Hindus or Buddhists at various times, but I don't call that a spiritual dedication, only political or social persuasion.

However, today thousands of men and women, boys and girls, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, believers and non-believers alike are voluntarily throwing themselves forward for spiritual elevation. In spite of so many social commitments, so many attractions and obligations, people of today are sincere about spiritual life.

Spiritual life is the destiny of every living being. So if in Kali yuga millions of people are going to practise spiritual life side by side with their other activities, then there is a golden lining on the horizon. You can't imagine how spiritually minded people are becoming. It is only if you look at the general morality of the community from the puritanical point of view that you will be broken.

I belong to a strange school of thinking. I don't care what the body does and I don't care what the mind thinks. For me, it is the self, the spirit, the *atman*, which is important, and the external life in the world does not affect the atman. To me it doesn't matter if humanity is bad. I don't care how much you drink and dance, but the thing I do care about is if you have a real yearning for spiritual elevation. I have every ray of hope and optimism about this Kali yuga, and I hope this spiritual resurgence will continue.

Is there a relationship between the so-called age of Aquarius and the Kali yuga?

Yes, there is an absolute relationship. We have entered into the age of Aquarius. No matter how you live or which religion you belong to, irrespective of your country, culture and civilization, of your age and sex, you are going to think about something beyond this body. You have already started questioning it. There was a time when scientists were not prepared to accept anything beyond this biological structure, but today we are being forced to think beyond these limitations. People used to believe that thought was a product of the brain, but now we know that the mind and brain are different.

As we proceed, we must allow spiritual philosophy to exist side by side with materialistic philosophy. In the age of Aquarius, as it is known, man will respect both states of existence. There have been times when he has only emphasized spiritual life and has ignored the material aspects, whereas in the twentieth century man has forgotten spiritual life and has placed emphasis on the material world. But in the last lap of the twentieth century and at the outset of the twenty-first

century, we will see man trying to make them parallel with each other. I believe matter and spirit, material advancement and awakening are both necessary for integral evolution.

In hatha yoga it says that man has to go through 84,000 incarnations to attain liberation. In answer to this the rishis gave 84,000 asanas to enable man to pass through all the stages of evolution in one lifetime. Would you please give your comments on this?

The rishis have said that there are 8.4 million embryos. An ant has an embryo, a frog has an embryo, every animal has an embryo through which it enters creation. This means that the individual consciousness has passed through 8.4 million embryos in the course of evolution, and therefore there are 8.4 million postures, each one representing one stage of evolution.

Out of these 8.4 million postures, 84,000 were known. Out of these, 84 were considered to be the most important, and these 84 postures are known as asanas. Asana does not mean yoga exercise, *asana* means posture. The position of the body is known as posture, and we have all assumed different postures in our various incarnations.

After assuming human birth, physical evolution comes to an end and spiritual evolution begins. Thus man will always be born as a human being, but he will be born as a different kind of human being with higher and higher spiritual awareness. When the individual being has assumed human birth, then his evolution continues on the level of senses, mind, intellect, emotion, chitta, and on the level of self.

Biological evolution of the individual self is controlled by the laws of nature because animals, including man, have no control over the biological laws. But when you are born as a human being and you have been given a mind, then you have that control over your spiritual evolution. This means that man does not have to wait any more for nature's grace; he can complete his evolution in one lifetime if he chooses to. A dog, an ant, an elephant, a wolf, or a horse has to wait, but not man.

With the evolution of man, a special faculty has emerged, and that is called awareness of one's own self in relation to time and space. When you are frightened, you know that you are frightened and you know that you know that you are frightened. This self awareness, called *jnanam* in Sanskrit, is exclusive to man. Man can think, he knows he is thinking and he knows that he knows that he is thinking. A monkey also thinks sometimes, but it does not know that it thinks. Jnanam has to be developed more and more. As well as being aware that you are thinking, seeing or waking, you should also know that there is something beyond this. Animals do not believe in God, nor do some people, but there is a difference. A man knows that he doesn't believe, he knows why he doesn't believe, and he tries to discover what is the truth for himself. So you see, the birth of a human being is so precious and so important. As well as fulfilling the conditions of the physical body, we also have to make proper use of this faculty called jnanam.

According to the rishis, human birth is the final and the last. They also say this is our greatest opportunity and if we utilize jnanam we can evolve very fast, maybe in one lifetime. So we don't have to worry about the 8.4 millions steps; we are in the last year of the university.

Why should we speed up the process of evolution by practising yoga? Isn't this going against nature's way?

Nature's laws are flexible. Nature is not a military dictator. It has certain laws and you can participate in them. You can accelerate the speed of your evolution according to the laws of nature. You are not opposing them by participating in them.

An example of accelerating the laws of nature is the conversion of uranium into nuclear energy. Before uranium is converted into nuclear energy, it has to fulfil so many conditions of transformation. If you know what those conditions are, uranium can be immediately turned into nuclear energy. Uranium is matter. It has within itself the nucleus of potential

energy. It is a type of proto-matter. It has space and time, plus and minus energy. In the centre is the nucleus, what we call matter. Now even if you do not produce energy from uranium, during the course of two or three billion years the uranium will naturally begin to radiate nuclear energy. However, if the process which ordinarily takes place in uranium matter over three billion years is known by man, he can accelerate it. This is not opposing nature, it is only exploiting the laws of nature. Similarly, practising yoga is not opposing nature, but exploiting and utilizing the natural laws. Allowing evolution to go along at its natural speed is ignorance of these laws.

If we become aware that certain individuals or certain philosophies are blocking the evolutionary plan, have we a duty to remove them, even if it requires political force?

The course of history throughout the ages has shown that no political force has ever been able to change man. Millions have died in religious wars, but nothing was changed. Even after the victors established their religion there was never any certainty that it would survive after fifty years, either externally or in the hearts of the people. There are millions of Hindus today who are not Hindu at heart. There are millions of Christians who are not Christian by faith and belief. There are millions of Muslims who are only Muslim because of fear. So political force is no solution to man's problems.

At the same time there is another point to consider, which is that nobody really knows the evolutionary plan. We talk about it, but we don't know what it is because our vision is very narrow. Danish people can only see Denmark, Indian people can only see India, Christians can only see Christianity and Muslims can only see Islam. All say that they know God's plan, but none can accept another's version of it.

Therefore, those of us who have studied history have become very doubtful about these great planners, and we prefer only to talk of the individual evolutionary plan. You and I grow individually, and in this way, if spiritual growth takes place within a few thousand people all around the world,

they will create a nucleus. Out of these few thousand people, perhaps one might know the laws of the complete evolutionary plan.

I have read all the contemporary spiritual literature as well as the fundamental books on religion, but I don't think they contain the solution to the problem. Individuals must speed up their spiritual life, that's important. Nature's plan is versatile. A garden has versatility; there are mangoes, peaches, apricots, roses, everything is there. In nature's creation there is the weak lamb and the powerful tiger as well. If we know the nature of creation and the laws that govern the evolution of creation, then perhaps we can help different individuals to evolve.

What is the purpose of man's existence?

I do not know why man was created. I have heard hundreds of answers, but I have not accepted any. I don't understand anything, but I definitely know that man has a mission and that man is an vehicle of spiritual consciousness. This physical body is just the outer form, like a cloak, and the mind is the different mechanisms, supply lines and connections which it conceals. There is something in us that is peculiar, which has no name or place, but we call it atma. That has to be experienced and once you have experienced it, you are on the way. It is only momentary, but during that moment the body is but the carrier and the mind is the different connections of the machine. After that, all other experiences are finished. During that moment there is no experience of name, body, time or space. For one instant you are dead, but its influence is enduring and abiding.

If that experience comes to you for a moment, then you have completed the purpose of human life. No matter how much you practise yoga, you cannot make it come. It is just a chance, and it seems that everything becomes favourable and harmonized for one moment. Even someone who knows nothing about yoga can have that experience. I'm giving you a word of consolation that is based on truth. Just remember one thing – an experience without experience.

Man has experimented with religions over the centuries just to have this experience. In fact all religions have failed. I mean no insult or dishonour to religions, but the fact has to be said that they could not tell us the truth. The religions of the world have been busy organizing society, politics, canons, rules and regulations; how to dress, eat, sleep, sit, talk, sing, marry and go to the grave. It is the right way for society. Religion is necessary for a social and political structure, but for those who want to have an experience, religion is absolutely unnecessary. It is much better not to rely upon it. An experience, that's all that spiritual life is.

How is it possible that the whole universe could originate from sound?

This is a question which is absolutely beyond anyone's comprehension and beyond anyone's view. The word *shabda* is a transcendental vibration; it is not a spoken word created through your tongue. It is *anahata shabda*, meaning a word which is not produced by any medium.

What is the place of the earth in the cosmos?

Just a point where the universal soul finds itself in the process of growing and knowing.

Do you see a peaceful future for mankind?

I am not pessimistic, but I believe that all that has been happening in the past will continue in one form or another. There will still be wars and hatred. The world is not going to become like an ashram. After all, what is life? If there is no passion, fear, insecurity and ambition, then life is not complete. Life is a combination of positive and negative. There must be night and day, sorrow and joy. It is the birth of a child that makes you happy and the death of an old man that makes you weep. Without the two forces to balance each other, life will not be worth living.

Man must have problems to keep his mind occupied, to keep him growing. If there are no problems, conflicts, tensions and

anxieties, then there is nothing for the mind to play with, and there is no reason for the mind to grow. If there is no passion, jealousy, hatred or worry, then the mind becomes very dull.

Is this what we are all growing towards?

I don't think so. I think we are growing more towards a spiritual consciousness by facing these realities that we call problems. I don't see that the problems will be resolved, but I see that consciousness will grow.

With the coming spiritual development can we expect great material suffering?

There are two channels of individual energy in existence. By the outer channel the material civilization is formed, and by the inner channel the spiritual culture is formed. Material civilization is the body or outer man and spiritual culture is the soul or inner man. Man's suffering is a result of over-emphasizing either of these two aspects. Material and spiritual life should both continue hand in hand.

There are three eternal forms of existence: matter, energy and consciousness. Some people consider matter to be something very worldly and denounce it. In the history of mankind these people have never found happiness or the absolute in their lives. Affluent Europe is unhappy and so is poverty stricken Asia, even though it is rich in spirituality. Spiritual wealth alone is not enough. Man has to create harmony between the two forms of his own existence, which is why we should be very careful in denouncing the material civilization. Ascetics and religious followers of the past, who have adamantly denounced the material civilization, created a big gap between reality and spirituality, and this is what we do not want.

How can spiritual development within society be supported in order to maintain a certain harmony in social structure, especially in the case of industrial unrest?

Spiritual development belongs to the realm of awareness and experience. A spiritual experience is a quality of your mind.

It does not matter what is happening in society because that is an external situation. In our modern times people have become oversensitive about certain social matters which do not really relate to them. Industrial or political upheaval will make no change in one's spiritually harmonious state.

We have to create a very strong spiritual tradition. This is important because many countries in the world which do not have a spiritual culture are undergoing a lot of pain and suffering. Political accidents, wars, problems of industrialization and epidemics will continue to occur because they are in the nature of life. We have to create a culture in which, consciously or unconsciously, individuals are led to spiritual unfoldment. If we completely ignore the elements of modern culture, the economic situation of our society will fall and there will be more unemployment and a disproportionate economic order.

Therefore, people who practise yoga and spiritual life should not speak out too much against the modern culture and modern systems. They should not denounce the realities upon which they are subsisting, upon which they are standing. They should just concentrate on their practices and their science, that's all. Try to take the message of yoga to the factories and industries because the people working there need it.

Is peace of mind the highest level of evolution?

Peace of mind is not the ultimate state. The ultimate is to realize your real being, the Supreme Consciousness. Inner peace or happiness is only a means to an end.

Would an atomic war be a destructive thing for mankind? What if everybody dies?

It can destroy man but not spiritual life or spiritual aspiration. Our fears are unfounded. Man has made many, many follies in his life but he has still managed to survive and adapt himself.

What do you think of Darwin's theory of evolution?

Perfectly alright, just a few amendments are necessary. Many people don't like to believe the theory of natural evolution,

but nevertheless natural evolution has been taking place so far as mankind is concerned. The shakti is in every speck of creation, particularly on the earth which we know. Our concept of life is very limited. As human beings we are very gross people, and when we define life we define it in terms of our own understanding of life. But life has different stages; wood has life, a dry leaf has life. I'm not talking of life now, but about the consciousness of shakti. Consciousness of shakti is the basic fact of existence. What is existence? It is basically an act of illumination. If there were no illumination, there would be no monitor of existence.

You are existing because you know you are existing. I know I am existing. Consciousness has been evolving continuously through and through all the invisible and visible forms on this earth. They are also within the fold of creation.

According to tantra there are two opposite poles of energy, just as you have in electricity. These poles are known as Shiva and Shakti. In our language they represent time and space, and they are also known as positive and negative energy. Time and space are the opposite poles, one is at the top and the other is at the bottom. You can find this polarity in everything which exists, not necessarily just in you and me, or in these electricity cables.

Because these two poles exist, movement is possible, existence is known and awareness is experienced. If there are not two poles of energy, then there is no awareness, no existence. Now these two poles of energy, Shiva and Shakti, always remain separate. They never live together, but before creation takes place they come close to each other. You know what happens when you put on the light switch; the electrical wires meet at a certain point, they produce a spark first, then there is light. Light is the result of the wires coming together.

When Shiva and Shakti meet with each other, an explosion occurs. This explosion takes place in the nucleus of matter. It is in an imperceptible form, smaller than an atom, molecule, electron or proton. It is the smallest that one can conceive.

One can perceive it only in nirvikalpa samadhi, when everything has been reduced to nothing. It is called *shoonya*, the void; that is the ultimate form of matter. At the point where purusha and prakriti meet in shoonya, the explosion takes place.

When the explosion takes place, the matter breaks into endless fragments and it disperses itself into space as the gaseous forms you call nebulae. The whole creation, the whole universe is born out of shoonya. How does it happen? By purusha and prakriti coming together. I'm not talking philosophy, I'm talking about exactly what happens in a leaf, a creeper, a tree, in water, in fire and earth, and in man and woman coming together. In everything, unless the two principles meet, no creation can ever take place. The very basis of creation is purusha and prakriti, Shiva and Shakti coming together. And this coming together is *yoga*, union of Shiva and Shakti.

How does this happen? It happens in meditation. In deep meditation the union takes place between the two opposite poles of energy. Do you know what the two opposite poles of energy are? Ida and pingala. They are separate, and even though they both dwell in the frame of the spinal cord, they are not together. They only join in ajna chakra, but they are not united now. When they meet, it is terrible. You should be ready to face it. This is the moment of creation.

Now, in the field of yoga, in the field of human creation and animal, vegetable and mineral creation, in the field of radioactive waves or electromagnetic waves, and also in many other fields which we don't even know about yet, a union between two is always taking place. When this happens energy is liberated, energy flows out, and it is always trying to express itself; in the form of animals, in the form of vegetables, in the form of first one sense, then two, three, four, then five senses, then five sensory organs, the motor cortex, then the mind, the emotions and so on. This is how the various processes of evolution are going on. Energy is continuously evolving out of matter.

When you talk about the theory of natural evolution, you are only talking about evolution so far as the physical body is concerned. The evolution of the diverse species of life, from simple cellular forms right up to the primates and man, has occurred over millions and millions of years due to an inbuilt flaw in the formation and transfer of the genetic material in the chromosomes which manifest during the process of reproduction. That process is known to biologists as mutation. Through this process, the genetic information passed on to the offspring changes slightly. And over many, many generations, new characteristics will develop in the children which the ancestors did not possess. New forms of life evolve in this way due to gradual permutation of the genetic material of the species which is contained within the sperm and the ova. This is how the human body has evolved to the present state.

Just as the giraffe's long neck proved an advantageous mutation, helping it to obtain the leaves of the trees which were beyond the reach of shorter species, so in the same way, with continuing mutation of sperm and ova, after one thousand more years something else might develop in man. There might be children with four heads; we don't know. There might be children with three eyes, one eye to perceive another dimension. By that time, all the sperm and ova, the whole gene pool would have completely changed its structure.

This is the theory of Darwin and Mendel, explaining the process of natural evolution. It is dependent on the forward process of nature, its creation, production and permutation – the spontaneous and automatic recombination of forces in the chromosomes and genes due to changing natural phenomena such as radiation, climatic conditions, dietary alterations, changing habits, differing activities and so on.

How does one understand death in terms of evolution?

Death is only a transition. I leave this house for a better or smaller house, whichever I like. If you take death to mean destruction, then the very theory of evolution itself is ungrounded.

Evolution exists, nature is evolving, the mind is evolving, the emotions are evolving. Evolution is a constant motion, but it is very slow. It is one motion intermingling into another so that you don't see it. Everything is in motion and thus death is just an exit; a point where the evolution enters into another phase.

Where does the cycle of birth and death end?

If you take a wheat seed and sow it, it will always grow. Why? Because it has the potentiality. But if you take a wheat seed and roast it, it will not be able to grow. Desire to live, longing to continue, clinging to life – as long as you have desires you have karma. As long as you have karma, you have the result. This is how action and reaction, cause and effect continue.

Do you mean there is no end to human development or evolution?

Human evolution is infinite, like a circle. Is there an end to a circle? Itzak Bentov, a scientist who was behind many new and revolutionary discoveries, wrote a book called *Stalking the Wild Pendulum*. In it he agrees completely with this concept. At the ultimate point of evolution, the individual goes out of the structure and becomes a creator. Such individuals are called the junior creators. Gurus are junior creators. When their evolution has reached a certain point, they come out. This is also how evolution is taking place in the material universe. When the energy revolves, at a particular point of evolution it issues forth and becomes another creative energy. We call it co-creator energy. This is the theory of avatars and gurus.

Then the situation is the same at the beginning as at the end?

Evolution is beginningless and endless. It is always in the making. Nature permutes and combines all the time. Therefore, you cannot say when there was no creation. Frankly speaking, this question cannot be answered this way. First of all we have to establish whether there is creation at all. Because it is within

time and space, the experience of creation is conditioned and its existence is relative. When you withdraw your mind in deep sleep and there is no mind, there is no creation.

Space, time and object are creation. Space, time and object are dependent on mental categories. The object does not exist independently of your mind. Therefore, the first thing is: Does matter really exist? Is there creation? In Vedanta as well as in modern physics, and also from what the great saints have said, we have come to the conclusion that creation never exists.

Our experience of creation is conditioned. What we experience during dream, we cannot experience when we are not dreaming. What we experience now cannot continue when we are dreaming because in the waking, dreaming and sleeping conditions of the mind, the perceptions are different. Therefore our experience of creation is only our mental attitude. So when we talk about evolution of purusha and prakriti, we are talking about a dream.

The reality has two stages of experience. The experience of matter is both relative and absolute. In the realm of relativity there is time, space and matter, but there is no absolute matter, no absolute mind. Absolute is the condition where creation never existed. So, when by the practice of yoga, you enter into nirvikalpa samadhi, then you enter into absolute experience. The absolute experience can never be homogeneous. It varies from time to time and from one place to another.

I dream that my mother is dead and I weep, but when I wake up I find she is all right. Now which experience should I believe? Should I laugh or cry? If I believe that the experience of waking is true, then it should be homogeneous. Only the absolute experience cannot be contradicted. A relative experience is always contradictory.

Therefore, first of all, we have to analyze the nature of reality and the truth about creation. The fact is, you have a mind, and so you have the objective universe. You enter into nirvikalpa samadhi and there is no universe for you. From the absolute point of view, there is no time and no space and there is no object either. So then, why talk about evolution?

22

Attachment and Desire

What happens when we have attachments?

Everything we do produces some type of result. Whether we are running a business, running a house, gardening, farming or interacting with our lover, each action produces a result. The result will be either positive, negative or a combination of both. A positive result means profit, a negative result means loss, and a combination of both means there is something you wanted and something which you did not really want. Every action, even if it is only in the realm of thought, is followed by one of these results. And when we have attachments our minds are not properly prepared to handle the results with calmness and stability. We have expectations and our minds are affected either positively or negatively.

Anyone who has attachments has certain expectations and consequently fears, anxieties and insecurities. When you have a property or business, the thought of a thief is always lurking somewhere in the background. When you have children, an institution, a job, a political career, etc., and you have attachments, there is always a feeling of insecurity and a fear of failure. Then when anything happens, the mind starts whirling, causing mental, emotional and physical problems. That is the consequence of karma in relation to its results.

If we develop the philosophy in life that we are only workers or actors, and the results of our actions are not our concern, they are beyond us, then we can overcome our fears

and anxieties. We have only to work within our capacity and to act without expectation. There are many factors that control the rewards, the profits or the losses, so it is really useless to have expectations and it is far better to prepare your mind to accept anything. If your mind is prepared in this way, then whatever you do is karma yoga. And even if you involve yourself in attachments to children, friends, property, etc., you will have no problems.

Does one need a particular quality in order to develop detachment?

In all the great books it is said that a bird always moves with two wings. If there is only one wing, it cannot fly. One wing is *jnana*, knowledge, and the other is *vairagya*, dispassion. If both these qualities are developed in life, then we can fly Godward, to spiritual heights.

If we have *vairagya*, it does not mean we detest the things of life, but that we are completely aware of their limitations. The sensual enjoyments we have in life are good and necessary up to a certain point, but beyond that they give us nothing but pain. So sensual pleasures have their limitations and knowledge of this fact is *vairagya*.

What is *jnana*? It is not the knowledge of books, it is the perceptive understanding of each and every thing. When you have *jnana* about death, love, loss and gain in life, you will be completely free from unhappiness. Death, love and hatred cause great disturbance to our minds. Why? Because we do not perceive things correctly. When you look at the events of life from the wrong angle you are unhappy, and when you look at them the right angle, it does not matter. That is called *jnana*.

When we really feel attached to something, how can we get rid of it without causing too much repression?

In such situations it is better to wait. Just decide that you would like to break the attachment, then let it run its own course. Many events in life change quite naturally.

Why do we have desires?

Desires are a necessary part of life because to desire is to recognize life. It is through desires that you can get to know your personality and your situation in life. There are some people who cannot desire and there are others who desire all day long.

If you analyze properly, you will come to know that desire is an innocent force in the mind. In childhood we desire toys. When we grow up we desire friends, then a job and money, then family life and children. Later we start to desire political position and name and fame, and then mental calmness, peace, relaxation, meditation, God, yoga, and so on and so forth. Now which of these desires can be satisfied and which cannot be satisfied? What is the ultimate form of desire?

Vedic philosophy believes that life is based on four things: *dharma*, duty; *artha*, motivation or purpose; *kama*, desire, and *moksha*, liberation. Desire is one of the basic elements of a good life. Without it you cannot evolve. In the second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* it is written that desire is born out of one's association with the objects of life. If you don't desire, it means there is something wrong somewhere. A person who is not able to desire is either a liberated sage or he is abnormal.

How can one attain the thing he most desires?

If you want to attain something in life, you must have one aim all the time, no second aim. I will give you an example. If you want to earn money, think only of that. You must not allow attachments to interfere. No attachments to children, to husband or wife, nothing. Develop detachment and one-pointedness. Personal relationships and involvements should not divert you. Detachment does not mean you should not have relationships with anyone. You can live with people and love them, but by keeping your one desire in mind, you can remain detached.

What are good desires and bad desires?

It is not so much a matter of good and bad desires, but you can say that instead of having negative or destructive desires, it is better to have desires which are beneficial and fruitful. A

positive desire is unselfish; you are more concerned about the welfare of others than yourself. A negative desire is selfish; you are only concerned with your own welfare and do not consider anyone else. It is very simple. If desire is selfish, it is negative; if there is no selfishness, it is positive. Desires can be distinguished very easily, even by a person who has them.

What causes man to run after pleasures?

It seems that somewhere far within the depths of our being a man is crying. We have never seen this inner man; we only know the outer man. We have seen the man who presents himself during sleep and in our dreams, but we haven't discovered that man who is beyond this sleep.

The awareness of man extends over these three bodies, but beyond them you also exist. You have not established the communication between this awareness and this mind. If you have, you would have seen a sad little soul sitting in a corner crying. Why? Because his promise has been unfulfilled and what he has been doing does not bring him any satisfaction. But once you withdraw your mind and go deep into the depth of your life and see the beautiful things there, then that little soul becomes very happy. Life comes to it. It is because of this inner unhappiness that man has been constantly running after external pleasures. By indulging in them he tries to cover up this inner sadness.

Many of the great thinkers have spoken about this subject. Ramana Maharshi always used to say, "Think it out well. Who am I?" But people don't understand; they don't know what self-realization is. Self-realization means you know the depths of your mind, of your being. You should know your complexes, your inhibitions and your ulterior purposes, and you should understand why you are weeping.

Some people say one should fulfil his desires and others say it is best to eliminate them. Which is correct?

The first principle is that one should fulfil one's desires. The second law is that desire cannot be satisfied. So, therefore,

the third principle is that one must practise both. If possible, one should aim for fulfilment of desires and desirelessness at the same time.

Desire is an expression of one's personality. If you keep a dirty rag in your room, you can't kill the foul smell by spraying it with perfume because the source of it is still there. You have to remove the dirty substance. In the same manner, you should not try, from your side, to reduce the desires. Instead you should try to transform your consciousness, the very frame of your mind, in such a way that it automatically desires less. Desire is a manifestation, a quality of a particular state of mind. When the mind is sick and ailing, when it is insecure or hungry, you will find more desires. When the mind is completely satisfied, healthy and secure, the desires will be less.

So I have to come to the conclusion that instead of trying to eliminate or avoid desires, it is much better to change the quality of desire. Desires are relative, they keep changing according to your situation, your development, age and experience. When you grow tired of one you automatically go to another, but there should be one desire which holds you permanently. And that is the desire for self-realization. You should always keep this ultimate desire in mind and you should never abandon it or grow tired of working towards its fulfilment.

What are the best yoga practices for people with desires and attachments?

Kriya yoga is the best because you do not have to control the activities of the mind when you practise. Antar mouna, ajapa japa and breath awareness are also good for this same reason, and because they can be practised at any time. All these techniques are particularly recommended for the rajasic temperament in which desire and attachment are very strong.

What is the difference between love and attachment?

Everything depends on how you explain love and how you explain attachment. According to Sufis there are two types of attachment. One is mundane and the other is divine or spir-

itual. In any case, love and attachment are both expressions of the same emotional stuff a man has. In substance they are not different, but in expression they are. Attachment brings pain, disappointment and frustration, and love magnifies the spirit and brings peace of mind.

In love there is movement of the spiritual consciousness and with attachment it is the lower mind which is functioning. That is the fundamental difference between the two.

Please explain detachment. Does it mean indifference?

If you read the *Bhagavad Gita*, you will have a better understanding of detachment and the correct attitude towards the results of your actions in life. In fact, detachment is the central teaching of the *Gita*.

Detachment is not just the physical separation of two individuals or objects. Detachment has to be practised on a different plane altogether. It can be developed by reassessing and re-evaluating your relationships. Supposing one of your children is very sick and you have a maid and a nurse attending the child. You are not involved in the child's care, but still you are extremely worried. You cannot sleep at night and thoughts of the child are with you all the time. Why? Because you have certain established and pre-imposed relations with the child. That is called attachment.

The maid and the nurse are serving the child day and night but they are not anxious. Although they wish very much that the child will become well, they are not afraid or emotionally disturbed by the situation. They are acting in the drama, but at the same time they can still witness it. That is called detachment. You, however, are only reacting to the child with attachment, and this is due to your pre-established relationship.

Now, let us suppose that the nurse's child becomes sick. She will have the same problem as you. So one has to re-establish one's relationships with one's actions and with the people and situations in one's life. If one's interactions are free of personal motives, then one is not bound by attachments.

I think attachment for your children is something different. A mother has an obligation to her children, so it is very difficult for her to be detached.

There is the concept of duty and social obligation. I accept that, but sometimes this concept of duty becomes a pretext for my own pleasure. I love my child so it brings me great satisfaction to fulfil my duty towards her. It is my pleasure. I am fulfilling a desire, not a social obligation.

When we take care of our children for our own satisfaction, we have put ourselves first. We try to make our children happy because when they are happy it brings us happiness. When the self is involved, that is ordinary karma. When the self is not involved, that is karma yoga.

Can a yogi have love and attachment for his country?

Yes, it is good to be loyal and patriotic, but you must be able to sacrifice your personal loyalty when international goodwill is at stake. That is the greater vision of a yogi.

How can I help my parents break free of their attachment to me and their need to control my life?

Get out. When a child doesn't want to go to school, what do the parents do? They try all types of magic on him and they have him admitted into school. If you want your parents to break their attachment to you, then it is the same as if I want to break this stick. It doesn't matter if I break it from this end or that end. Either they break it or you break it. Then come here.

23

Karma

What is karma?

Literally, *karma* means action, but action by itself is nothing. Supposing I have to go to war, and I kill many people, that is my action, but it is not my karma. On the other hand, if I kill the people out of hatred, then it is karma because it influences my mind and personality. Thus, as well as referring to action, karma also means the impression of an affair of life on the mind of an individual.

According to eastern philosophy, even if you do not work, cook, clean your room, or do anything at all, still you are doing karma. Even at night while in deep sleep, man is working on the deeper planes. Primarily man works in his unconscious; the conscious action is merely an expression of unconscious motivation. Also, the organs in the body can never remain inactive, as more than ten bodily systems are working all the time. As such, there is not a moment in life when a person can remain actionless.

Are there different types of karma?

Yes, there are various types of karma. Some we call daily karmas. They have practically no relevance to one's inner life; they are mechanical and routine. Perhaps the only influence they exert on you would be monotony and tiredness. Another form of karma is known as motivated karma. It is performed with a particular motive in mind, and it creates seeds. These

seeds form mental impressions and they influence the whole personality, the mind, body and emotions. For example, let's suppose I start a business. If the business is successful, I am happy; if it is not, I am very unhappy. However, my state of mind is not due to the outcome of the business, but to my motivation. In other words, according to the basis of our motivation, the consequences ensue.

If I am a judge and I sentence a man to death in order to protect the community from a dangerous criminal, then I am not making a karma that will rebound on me. But if my motive for having a man executed is personal or biased, then I will have to suffer the consequences of karma. This is a universal law.

I do not believe in reincarnation, therefore I find it difficult to accept the existence of karma.

Whether you believe in reincarnation or not, still there is karma in you. There is the subtle form of karma which you have inherited from your parents. In science they call this the molecular inheritance, the DNA molecule. If your father or grandfather had a disease, you are likely to inherit it. So karma does not only mean that karma which you created in your previous life. Karma is the total acquisition from your previous life, from your parents and forefathers, and from your present life and environment.

Are there any techniques we can use for getting rid of or controlling karma?

It is not easy to get rid of karma, and everyone is subject to it. Each action has a reaction which is equal and opposite. This is the first law in science, the first law of Newton. The more you push a pendulum to the right, the more it will swing to the left, then again to the right, then again to the left; action and reaction. No action in life goes unpaid and you can't hide anything from yourself. You are your own witness and observer. You know what you think, feel and do and you know your real intentions. By observing yourself, you can control your karma.

There are several ways to rid yourself of karma. The shortest is through penance and austerity, but it is very difficult. Meditation is an easy method, or there is an easier way still. Seek an evolved guru and receive a mantra from him. Live with him for a considerable period of time and gradually the karmas will start to fall away. Once you progress in spiritual life, you can bypass certain forms of destiny.

What is the difference between your own choice and karma?

Choice is also karma. There are two forces in the universe, one is called karma, action and reaction, and the other is called free will. Free will is not karma; you will and it happens. The will is independent of karma. But the emergence of willpower takes time in spiritual life. As a human being evolves and becomes master of his own mind, he develops the ability to exert his will.

When the mind becomes powerful, sometimes it is able to give shape to the events of your life, but that is also a part of the chain of karma. If you think strongly, “I am going to do that” and it happens, this is not an outcome of will, but of a strong mental choice you have made. There is a big difference between willpower and mental choice. Willpower is a mighty force, and when you have developed it fully, you can transcend the gravity of karma. Then your evolution is complete and you become a co-creator, a junior god.

If one becomes liberated through the exhaustion of karma, must he restrict his actions to avoid creating more karma?

Liberation does not mean renunciation of action or karma. A liberated person continues to act on the physical, mental, intellectual, emotional and sensory planes. He may plough the land or perform any kind of work because it is not the actions which bind a person, it is the ego. When ego is involved in your actions, karma becomes your property and you have to accept the responsibility for it.

A liberated person has dissociated the ego from his actions, his karma. He works just like a servant or a shop assistant does. Although a shop assistant works with his mind, body and intellect, he does not hold any responsibility for what is happening in the shop. On the other hand, the owner of the shop is not able to detach his ego from the shop, and therefore he is responsible for the good and bad karmas that accrue from the shop. Profit belongs to him and so does loss because his personality and ego are involved. Where ego is involved, there is karma; where there is no ego involvement, there is no karma.

Is it possible to eradicate karma by practising tapasya and titiksha?

The first law of karma is that you have to undergo the consequences of both good and bad actions. You may often wonder if you can escape the law of karma, but you have to fulfil the commitments of destiny; there is no other way. However, in order to relieve the pressure of karma, the great thinkers of the past suggested two methods of sadhana. One is the moderate way which is suitable for everybody. It is called tapasya. The other method, which is more demanding, is called titiksha.

Tapasya means undergoing a process of suffering spontaneously and willingly. Inevitably, if you don't subject yourself to this process of suffering voluntarily, then nature will compel you to undergo it. If you are constipated, in the course of time you are going to develop diarrhoea, piles or some other disease. If you put yourself through the practice of shankhaprakshalana, it is going to be an arduous job for an hour or two, but it will relieve you of all the consequences of the karma of constipation. Otherwise, instead of suffering for one and a half hours, you will have to suffer for months or years. So tapasya reduces the period of suffering to which man is bound by his karma.

Titiksha is to be able to bear heat and cold and live in a balanced state of mind when you are praised, insulted or kicked or when you are promoted to a highly esteemed position.

Your mind is unaffected by loss and gain, pain and pleasure, victory and defeat. You can resist and tolerate when you are thrown into the extremes of life. Through the practices of tapasya and titiksha you can exhaust a lot of karmas.

Is it possible to take on somebody else's karma?

If there is a deep communication or psychic link between two people, a transference of karma takes place. The depth of awareness is responsible for this. If you love somebody greatly, whether friend, husband, wife, child or lover, it is an automatic process. You can even take on the karma of your enemy if you are constantly aware of him.

In the guru-disciple relationship, if the two are unified in spirit and consciousness, all the karmas of the disciple are automatically transferred to the guru and the knowledge of the guru is also automatically transmitted to the chela. But if the guru and disciple are not unified in consciousness, this does not happen.

Are we victims of our parents' karma?

We inherit the karmas of our parents, whether they are good or bad. If they are good karmas, they make us progress in life; if they are bad, we are victimized. Therefore, every parent must be very careful, for each child has to fight to rid himself of the karmas the parents have created.

Why is it the karma of some people to be born mentally retarded or physically handicapped?

When you follow spiritual life, you develop purity and clarity of mind and body, and then certain rules govern your psychological and biological processes. But if you follow a particular culture which is alienated to spiritual discipline and ideals, it will ignore all the systems and rules which control the psychological, biological and emotional processes that govern that whole lifespan. In such cultures, there is untold suffering, and in every generation children are born handicapped or with a lower mental capacity.

I am very sensitive to the sufferings of others. Is it bad for my karma if I want to help when I see someone suffering or trying to solve a serious problem?

No, it is a good karma, you are eliminating your stock and purifying your mind. If your brother, sister or mother is suffering, it is natural to feel, but when it is a stranger and you are suffering on his account, that means you are not selfish. It also means that you have transcended the cult of your personality. That's why you are feeling for him.

When you feel for the sufferings of your own people, it is called sympathy and when you feel for the sufferings of others, it is called compassion. Mercy without selfishness is compassion, and mercy with self-interest is pity or sympathy.

Are animals bound by karma in the same way as man?

Each and every being in this world, including those of the mineral and vegetable kingdoms, is moving in accordance with the definite predetermined laws of nature. As long as man is incompetent mentally and physically weak, he is also subject to the laws of destiny. But as he develops greater awareness, he gradually transcends the dictates of destiny and karma and is able to create a new law and order for himself.

When a being incarnates as a human, he brings with him a higher form of awareness called *jnanam*, which no other being is endowed with. *Jnanam* is awareness of one's own existence in relation to time and space. "I know I am; I know that I know I am", this is *jnanam*.

If a person does something wrong, he will suffer because he knows he has done something wrong. If he kills someone, he is going to suffer, maybe not legally, but definitely mentally. If he steals or does something which he believes to be wrong, he will suffer mental agony. Why? Because of his awareness. On the other hand, a dog has no guilt, so if he bites someone he will not suffer or have any problems. Animals may bite you or serve you, but nature will not reward or punish them. Their actions do not bring about reactions.

During man's spiritual development does he always go forward or does karma sometimes make him go back?

According to Hindu philosophy evolution is progressing, but sometimes, on account of karma, you may have to go back. Supposing you are a spiritual person and you want to go high, but at a particular stage you realize you have passions, a desire for sense enjoyment or a revengeful ambition. What will you do? The same as you would if you were on your way to the airport and you discovered you have left your passport behind. You would have to turn back, finish your business there and then move on again.

When you have to retreat in spiritual life, you don't become an animal in body, you are a human being. You may behave like a tiger, but your body hasn't changed, it is just an experience. When on account of karma, you have to turn back, it is only temporary and it is not for the sake of suffering, but for experience.

Does destiny exist or do we control our own fate?

Destiny does exist. If you want to go back to Bombay, that is your destination; it is your destiny. Destiny is based on the law of action and reaction. Every action, every karma has a reaction. Just as you throw a pebble into a lake and that creates ripples, in the same way, when you make karma, you are creating ripples in the cosmos.

Karma is not only action; a thought or feeling is also karma. Karma means movement. Wherever there is mobility, there is karma. Every karma causes ripples or vibrations and these keep on moving in a chain reaction. Each action creates a reaction; and the reaction makes another reaction. In the course of time, this chain reaction is multiplied into a million-fold reactionary forces in life, and that creates destiny. Destiny is the law of nature and you can't ignore it. All animals, in fact, the entire universe, is under the law of destiny.

What is the necessity of karma yoga?

In my early days when I lived in Sivananda Ashram with my guru, I thought that when I left the ashram I would remain

quiet and contemplate. However, in 1964, when I started the ashram in Munger, many people came to stay with me, but nobody remained there for more than three or four months. This was because there was no work for them in the ashram. They just learned and practised a lot of asanas, pranayama, mantra, meditation, etc., but this did not create stability in them because their minds were not purified.

After a few years, we started a little bit of work in the ashram; gardening, printing, editing, bookwork, typing or kitchen work, and since then the number of inmates has been growing every week. Now people stay in the ashram for years together. Sometimes they remain for five, ten or twelve years, with all the difficulties of ashram life. On Sundays I often tell the swamis to close all the departments. Sometimes I don't allow them to work at all for three consecutive days and they become so restless. Many of them come to my room asking me to give them some work. So now the swamis and the guests realize that nature has created in man a desire and a compulsion to work. That is the positive role of desire in life.

If man did not have desires, he would not be compelled to work and if he did not work, his mind would not grow. For a person who has not evolved beyond *tamo guna* and *rajo guna* it is compulsory to work. Even if he has great wealth and all the necessities of life in abundance, he must still work. Only when you have reached the state of *sattwa*, the highest point of balance and equanimity, may you remain without work, without karma. For purification of the mind karma is essential, and if you practise karma yoga, you attain purity much more quickly.

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Reincarnation

Can you explain reincarnation in simple terms?

When your car meets with an accident on the way, and nothing happens to you, what do you do? You don't stay with the useless car, you find yourself another vehicle so you can continue your journey. In the same way, the body is the vehicle for the spirit, soul, *atman*, consciousness, or whatever you wish to call it. When you leave the body in order to fulfil your evolution, you have to take another body. Life is continuous until you have completed your cycle of evolution.

Is there any scientific evidence to support the theory or reincarnation?

A lot of work has been done in India as well as abroad on the possibility of rebirth. Hundreds of cases have been collected which suggest reincarnation. From a logical point of view, reincarnation must take place because the whole cosmos is evolving and reincarnation is a part of evolution. Not only man, but plants, trees, animals and minerals are continuously regenerating and disintegrating. This great metamorphosis in the realm of matter is always taking place.

Those of you who have studied chemistry, physics or electronics will know what happens to matter after disintegration and how matter is evolving year after year. Matter is eternal; there is no total destruction or elimination. When you do not accept reincarnation, you accept destruction and

annihilation, but logically, mathematically and scientifically matter is indestructible. Matter may undergo a change of form, but not a change of substance. If you take a lump of mud and make a small pot with it, you have changed the form, but not the substance.

When the spirit leaves the body, which is composed of the five elements, earth, water, fire, air and ether, the frame remains and undergoes the process of disintegration. As the whole cosmos is composed of these five elements, when the individual elements return to their source after death, they become universal. It always happens because an individual is a part of the totality, and if you accept the theory of the totality or macrocosm, you cannot ignore the existence of the microcosm. If you say there is an ocean, you must also accept the reality of a drop in the ocean. The drop is the microcosmos and the ocean is the macrocosmos.

What actually happens after death?

When a person dies, there is definitely death of the physical body. The moment the prana leaves the body everything stops, then the spirit departs from the body in an unconscious state. Only if one is a yogi or an evolved person can there be consciousness of the soul's transmigration.

According to most theories, the soul remains in a dormant potential state, just like the seed of a tree, for a minimum of thirteen days. During this time it passes through the seven different realms of the universe before going to a particular plane of existence where it will remain for a certain period, according to its karma. After that, reincarnation is possible. The more the soul hankers after worldly things, the quicker is the rebirth.

Those who have deep attachments to life, who are very sensual, or spiritually ignorant, are not very selective about parents or where they are to be born, so they enter into any womb almost immediately. Sadhakas, yogis and those who have left the physical body in total awareness may wait centuries before they choose to be reborn. They will wait for the

right circumstances and for the ideal mother and father, possibly selecting parents who have already transcended ordinary consciousness.

It is like this: if a person is really hungry, he will eat anything as soon as possible, even if it is indigestible, but if he discriminates, he will examine the food in the finest shops until he finds the best. Similarly, after death, in accordance with one's nature, one either hurries back immediately to suffer again, or else waits for a better chance with the right parents.

How can we be sure that the soul survives after death?

If it didn't survive, how could an experience take place after death? In research on dying, the experiences of those who have been revived after death have been recorded. It was found that they first entered into darkness and then felt agony and pain. They heard peculiar cries and screaming. After some time they found the darkness was diminishing and the light was growing little by little, just like the dawn of a new day. They could not see any human beings, but they saw gardens of flowers like they had never seen in this world, and they heard strange music unlike the music we have here. Then they returned again through the same darkness.

Now, it is not the experience that is important here, but who experienced it. If a person was dead and nothing survived, how could we have this experience? This proves that the soul survives death.

Secondly, for many years parapsychologists all over the world have been collecting cases of children who are able to narrate their previous lives. Most of these children are no more than three years of age. Unless the soul survived after death, how could such small children relate things from their former lives which were verified to be true?

It seems to me that reincarnation or continuity is the law of nature. There is no ultimate destruction, only metamorphosis takes place. The body is not the ultimate, it is only a chariot. The chariot needs a driver and the driver is the self or consciousness

which migrates after death with a collection of memories and experiences. Then, in order to fulfil itself, the driver chooses another chariot and moves into another life.

Which Hindu scriptural texts discuss reincarnation?

Long before the time of Buddha and the great Jain saint Mahavira, the *Brahma Sutras* were formulated. These sutras are small aphorisms which talk about the supreme nature of creation and the transmigration of the self. About two hundred years before the existence of the *Brahma Sutras*, the great rishi Jainini formulated the *Dharma Sutras*, aphorisms on natural duties. In these sutras, Jainini emphasized the doctrine of karma, which is actually reincarnation.

In the vedic texts there is a system known as the shraddha ceremony which is performed thirteen days after the death of a person. Mantras are chanted from the Vedas, saying, “I give you water if you are thirsty, I give you clothing if you are cold, and I pray for you if you are suffering,” and so on. Hence, even in the Rigvedic period, the concept of reincarnation was known to the people. And even the *Bhagavad Gita*, which dates back to before Buddha, Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, gives many very strong hints about reincarnation.

Please explain when and how the process of reincarnation occurs.

Reincarnation does not occur at conception. When the ovum is fertilized, all that happens is that a receptacle is formed. The soul does not enter that receptacle until the fourth month of pregnancy. It is then that reincarnation takes place. Conception is a similar process to constructing a house. The bathroom, bedrooms, kitchen, sitting room, laundry, etc., all have to be ready before the owner moves into the new home. In the same way, everything has to be made ready before the spirit enters the body. Only when the spirit enters the embryo does reincarnation occur.

In the embryo, the spirit becomes fused with the personalities of its father and mother. For a while, during the ninth month

of pregnancy, it becomes aware of its previous existence and personality. This happens about fifteen days before birth. Then it is all forgotten and the memory becomes inaccessible. The spirit is then only aware of the womb and its own existence. This continues for just one or two days before birth takes place.

When a child is born, is it always a reincarnation, or can it be a new life?

All beings are reincarnations, but some may have completed their own cycle of evolution and then accepted rebirth so they could come and help mankind. Such a birth takes place in the normal way as the result of a highly evolved man and woman coming together, or it could be an immaculate conception, although this is very rare.

In other cases, when a couple is very pious and noble, spiritual and grand in mind and heart, the child they conceive will be a higher soul. This is also very rare because our hearts, our bodies and our minds are very weak. We don't even know what we can produce. Most people just want to create children, they are not concerned with quality. However, when we practise yoga and meditation and revolutionize the pattern of our life, quality production is possible as higher souls may select us for conception.

In our evolution through our reincarnation are we always exclusively male or female, black or white, or do we interchange?

In reincarnation there is no such difference as male and female, black and white or Hindu, Muslim and Christian. The individual soul has to make a choice for the fulfilment of his desires.

With each incarnation, does a person come back more highly evolved, or can he go back to a lower form of being?

Sometimes in higher incarnations, a yogi or a saint may discover a certain experience which he somehow missed or avoided. In order to fulfil his obligation to the laws of nature,

he comes down to the lower kingdom to undergo that experience. After he has fulfilled it, he goes back to the exact point where he stopped his forward journey.

Is it possible to lose one's soul?

It is possible for a person to dissolve his personal consciousness into spiritual consciousness. This is how we talk in spiritual life. In worldly terms, yes, we lose our soul many times, to temptations, to all those things where the soul finds itself in torture and suffering.

Is there such a thing as eternal damnation?

If the principle of evolution is a scientific fact, and if the soul is not a static substance; if growth, progress and metamorphosis are the universal principles controlling not only the human kingdom, but other kingdoms as well, then there should not be anything like eternal damnation or condemnation.

If we lead a pure and spiritual life, are we reincarnated as enlightened beings?

If you have done everything right and have awakened yourself spiritually, then you are born just where you finished in the previous life, and you proceed from there. Otherwise you forget, just like everybody else. As a baby you knew where you had evolved to, what faculties had been awakened within you, but as your physical and mental bodies developed and became capable of action, you began to forget the duties towards yourself and slipped into materialism; eating, drinking, sleeping, dancing. These things have to be done, but while doing them the ultimate goal should always be remembered. Otherwise we are like any pig or fish.

What happens after the final liberation?

When the final liberation takes place, the physical body survives for a maximum period of twenty-one days. The body can only survive for this long because it is not protected and it is not nourished by anything, there is no circulation, respiration or

prana. This body only survives on man's will to live, so because the liberated man has become completely oblivious of the body, disintegration or death takes place. If you have no interest in your body, you cannot remain with it.

Although *jivanmuktas* or liberated saints may no longer have any need for a body, some of them still incarnate because they have not yet permanently removed themselves from the cycle of rebirth. *Jivanmuktas* incarnate, *paramahansas* incarnate, and so do *rishis* and saints. Only *videhamuktas* do not incarnate. *Videhamuktas* are those who have become completely free from the tentacles of life and the superficial structures of body consciousness. Some of the saints from the Christian, Hindu, Jain and Muslim traditions have been *videhamuktas*. And some of the saints of Greece, who were called cynics, have also been *videhamuktas*.

There is one important thing that people are unable to understand, and that is that liberation is a continual process. You are already liberated, but at a subtle level, not completely. If you were not liberated, then you would be behaving like a cow, a buffalo or a donkey. As the process of liberation continues, more and more light becomes vivid before you and things become better and clearer. Liberation is not like magic, in which you remove something and another thing appears in its place. It is always going on.

Ask a scientist to explain what the liberation of energy is and at what point the liberation takes place. He won't be able to explain it. He might say, "Well, it is a thing in the making." Liberation is a continuous process and it has already occurred when the spirit was liberated from the mineral kingdom to the herbal kingdom. Then again it was liberated from the herbal kingdom to the animal kingdom. Then it was liberated from the animal kingdom to the human kingdom. Again it was liberated from the lower human kingdom to the higher intelligent human kingdom. And then it was liberated from the higher intelligent human kingdom to the spiritually intelligent kingdom, as many people are. Liberation is actually another name for the outcome of evolution.

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World Affairs

Is evolution moving to a higher level?

There are two theories about it. One is that man is degenerating and the whole world is entering a dark age. The other theory is that man is evolving. According to Vedanta he is evolving, and according to some thinking he is regressing. I believe we are passing through a period of crisis, but everything is evolving. I don't think things are going to degenerate.

A period of crisis occurs when animal evolves into man, or man into divine. You could say that we human beings are experiencing labour pains and therefore we think everything is going wrong. Evolution is the law of nature and its ultimate point is union with higher consciousness. As rivers proceed to the ocean and become the ocean, likewise when we evolve we attain oneness with the higher self.

How can the tremendous growth of the world's population be explained by the theory of reincarnation? And why is it that this surplus population is born to a miserable life on earth? Can it really be explained by the law of karma or has the growth of the human population to do with the mass extinction of various groups of animals which used to live on this earth?

When this ashram began there was only one swami, that was me. Then there were three, then ten, and now there are sixty or

seventy swamis. Why? Because not so many people are leaving the ashram. In the same way, when we talk about the process of reincarnation, the lower beings are constantly evolving under the laws of nature, but the evolution of man also depends on his own personal effort, his striving for spiritual growth. So what happened is that the animal kingdom has been evolving steadily, but man, on account of his spiritual degeneration over the past few centuries, has not migrated from human existence. He keeps coming back, so we have extra population.

If you clearly analyze the fact that some continents are densely populated and others are not, you will find that those countries which are overpopulated have more freedom and less tension. In those countries people are able to live in utter simplicity, there are fewer laws and regulations and there is no taxation. South America, Africa, India and some of the other Asian countries are overpopulated, whereas Europe is less populated. It seems that the spirit refuses to be born into the more sophisticated and complex societies.

Every human being has a natural tendency to migrate from a place where he finds a little difficulty or discomfort. Likewise, the individual soul, after its interim stay in the causal body, chooses to be born into a society where there is a free flow of life. If you plant some seeds here, they will start growing, but if you put them in the Sahara desert, they will never grow. Just as seeds need the correct soil for growth, in the same way the individual soul likes to incarnate in a place where there is freedom and a free flowing life.

Why is the West looking to the East for spiritual knowledge?

The West can learn a great deal from the East, and likewise the East can learn many things from the West. The West perfected external man and the east perfected internal man. Internal man is the soul of external man, or you could say external man is the vehicle of internal man. Internal man stands for spiritual life, the summum bonum of human existence. In the same way that Shiva and Shakti complement each other, so it should be with the East and the West.

Is it not better to discourage the increase in materialism within a culture in favour of fostering spiritual life?

In India, for many centuries we have been trying to live in simplicity and happiness without overemphasizing material culture, but it is not easy. Today, the whole world is making fun of India. Because Indians are very simple people, the rest of the world says they are backward: they live in small, dirty houses, they don't have proper bathrooms, they don't have toilets, their streets are very dirty, etc.

We are well aware that if we emphasize material culture, it will be exploited. It happened in the ancient past and it can happen again. But at the same time, if you do not have this western type of society, and if you do not have an open philosophy, you will have to be like Indians and everybody will mock you. One important thing we should remember is that man's external life can be anything. You may be the owner of a big business, an employee in a butcher's shop or a barman in a night club, but internally you are a yogi or philosopher. It is the internal life that is important, and therefore we should not shun material culture. But at the same time we must set a limit to it.

Can you speak to us about the dangers of pollution?

In every large city there are many houses with septic tanks. Millions of people use these systems. All this waste matter is continuously going into the ground. How much subterranean pollution will accumulate in one year or in ten years? Nature cannot cope with it forever. After twenty or thirty years of this abusive treatment, the earth might produce some dangerous bacteria which will start a new and deadly disease. Our water comes from the subterranean space, so it will definitely be affected. Maybe it already is! If all our waste matter was above the ground, the sun would purify it, but in our ignorance and selfishness we are retaining it underground and polluting the entire face of the earth.

You see, people do not know the dangers. Nobody knows what the pollution problem is doing. Does anybody know the effects of pollution in London, New York or Bombay? What is

happening in the subterranean space? People only see what they want to see. They fail to notice that the air in the cities is becoming very poisonous. In New York, where there are millions of cars and staggering emissions of automobile fumes, you can polish your car in the morning and by evening it will be absolutely black with pollution.

The whole environmental situation has to be corrected. People will have to take an active role in protecting their environment. Commercial people and business corporations will not do anything, even though they agree with what we say. I think it will have to be the sannyasins and swamis who instigate the change. They will encourage greater awareness of the world that surrounds us and they will give a new dimension to the appreciation of nature's beauty.

Why do you think people smoke so much?

Every time I travel by plane in Europe I notice that the very second the 'No Smoking' sign goes off, almost everybody lights up a cigarette. This not only pollutes the atmosphere, it is also a sign of everybody's agitation and their inability to cope with the complexities of modern life.

On the other hand, if you go to countries where people live in the mountains and open spaces, you do not see this problem. If you fly in India, you will see that only a few people smoke. Once I was flying to Tasmania in Australia and I noticed that nobody on the plane was smoking. The passengers were all farmers; they were healthy people and they all had calm minds. You see, our situations have an influence on our habits.

People have little pleasure in life. There are few beautiful places and there is really nothing to enjoy. Most people spend their days in a shop or a factory, at a desk, a telephone or a typewriter, and there are all sorts of difficulties and tensions at work. That is why people are so involved in sexual life, they must have some pleasure. Whenever a boy sees a girl or a girl sees a boy, immediately one thought comes to their mind. They seek some temporary escape from their monotonous existence.

So we must learn to live more self-sufficient lives, and to rely less on sophisticated mechanization which leads to boredom, frustration and tension.

Could you comment on the marital situation of today?

Today, people have forgotten the real purpose of marriage. Is it only for progeny, pleasure and companionship that people marry? Or is there a spiritual purpose behind marriage? If the partners are aware of its true purpose, then marriage will be part of their spiritual evolution. It will be a means by which they can peel away the outer layers of the self and discover their true inner being. But if they see progeny, pleasure and companionship as the purpose, then I don't think the marriage will succeed. Nor will it ever be a source of perpetual happiness.

What we have to do is redraft the whole constitution of marriage. We have to bring an absolutely new dimension, approach and interpretation to marriage and the union between a man and a woman.

How can we adapt to an atmosphere of violence, disorder and lawlessness?

From the beginning of creation there has always been an atmosphere of violence, restlessness, anarchy and tyranny. Man has not changed at all; he is the same as he was yesterday and tomorrow also he will be the same. We have to face this fact, and in order to do this we need a philosophy of life. You can call it ahimsa or unity, compassion or atma, or any name you like. Where there is violence we should talk of love and compassion, and where there is restlessness, tyranny and anarchy, we should talk of unity. These are the positive ideals which we have to realize and talk about daily, without losing heart and without becoming frustrated.

As I told you, right from the beginning of creation we have seen incessant violence and injustice. Recorded history is nothing but an account of the exploits of murderous emperors and military generals. And this is the history that is being

taught to our children. They never learn about the great men and women who came to instil peace, love and unity amongst men. I only came to learn about Buddha, Guru Nanak and Christ when I became a swami. In my schooldays my teachers only taught me about the wars and the power-striving leaders of nations.

When you only teach your children the history of these people and you build them up to be heroes, what more can you expect from your children? They see that those who lead a good life lose opportunities and people who are honest are the ones who are cheated. Why? Because society as a whole is not a place where we can exhibit our spiritual virtues. So a whole generation will have to suffer until social evolution comes to a point where those who create wars and violence will be condemned. It is only after a period of suffering that a new social structure will come about.

Why do men kill each other?

In the process of evolution the mind has to pass through three major stages as it transforms from the gross level to a higher level, from tamas to sattwa. During the tamasic stage man is governed by instinct alone, he has no discrimination, understanding or knowledge. During the rajasic state there is duality and man is influenced by his passions and emotions. In the sattwic state there is equilibrium, harmony and oneness. If you know how the mind is influenced by these three gunas, you will understand that man's actions are often instinctive and this is precisely why one man kills another man.

It is only by systematically reforming the mind and transforming the inner nature that man can transcend this crude behaviour. In order to change the inner nature there is only one way, and that is through the practice of yoga and meditation. Unfortunately, not all civilizations have been exposed to yoga; they have had religion, but religion can only give intellectual shaping. It cannot transform man's inner nature.

If you look back through history, you will find that those civilizations which practised some form of spiritual discipline

have not been instrumental in killing and in creating wars. It is those communities and cultures which did not practise yoga or any form of spiritual discipline that have been responsible for killing thousands of people, and sometimes atrociously so, in the name of God and religion. So if you turn back the pages of history books and try to find an answer as to why man kills man, the only intelligent explanation that will come to your mind is that man has not been able to effect a change in his inner nature. And the reason why he hasn't been able to do this is simply because he has not known how.

I have read that there are men and women hundreds of years old who are guides of humanity. Is this possible?

Yes, it is possible. This peculiar congregation of human beings, who can think from ordinary crime through to travelling to the moon, have such great minds. But unless there are these higher guides behind mankind, controlling the minds, not individuals minds, but the mind in general, the universal mind, man would be more destructive than the cruellest savages. You see, we have compassion side by side with cruelty. We have love side by side with hatred. We have the ability to cooperate as well as to destroy. These two completely opposite qualities are functioning in human beings, but the unseen guides are able to hold our minds and control them so that we may overcome our instincts and animal tendencies.

Can one live in this world and be free of a system and all its power games?

I remember being asked this question once before. I was at Zurich airport waiting for my flight. An American girl was sitting beside me and we were talking about yoga and institutions. She told me that she did not like organizations and systems. I said, "But you need your plane to be on time, don't you?"

You can be free from all systems, but only when you become desireless. If you need a plane to be on time and you want to have an orderly city, a nice house, a clean bathroom

and so on, you must have systems. And if you have systems, then you must have the games. Can you imagine a political system without any games?

As I see it we have to make some sort of compromise. First simplify your needs, then many systems will be unnecessary for you. Otherwise, if you are going to live in a complicated society where people have such complex demands and desires, you will have to accept organizations, systems and solid discipline. If not, you will live in a world of anarchy where there are no rules. You can be executed at any time even if you have not committed any crime nor made any mistake. Anyone who is powerful can just shoot you or have you thrown into prison and you can't do anything about it. So in order to protect the virtuous people in our society, we must accept the system, no matter how complicated it is. If we want to have a peaceful society and a world of greater unity, we must have a system and laws that are respected by everybody.

Anarchists and terrorists do not like systems. That is what I told the girl at Zurich airport. I said, "Personally, you may not like organizations and systems, but they are necessary to protect you, otherwise a man could just grab you and take you away. You might cry for help, but who would rescue you?"

Some philosophies have claimed that the thought and action of suicide signifies a complete detachment from life. What is your opinion?

I think in most cases suicide is a state of mind which results when one has completely lost control over the mind. A person commits suicide because he has great clinging to life, not because he does not want life. Perhaps he wanted life even more than he should have. When do you want to die? Whenever your wishes are not fulfilled. So, usually when a person commits suicide, it is because he has deep desires and aspirations in life which cannot be satisfied. He wants to die to destroy that attachment which has brought him pain and disappointment. Such a person has problems after suicide as his soul hovers around for a long time before it migrates.

Suicide is only complete detachment from life when it is an act of martyrdom or self-immolation. In the Buddhist religion, for example, there have been people who have set fire to themselves as a ritualistic way of dying. And in India during the Muslim period, the Hindu women used to set fire to themselves after their husbands died as they did not want the Muslims to molest them. During medieval times, there was much religious and political exploitation, and when terrorists came to ransack the cities, the women used to set fire to their houses and die in the flames. Thus, in these instances there was a definite purpose in the minds of those who practised self-immolation. It was never done out of frustration or because of dissatisfaction or heartbreak. Therefore, self-immolation is quite different from other forms of suicide; it is an act of detachment.

Could you say that sannyasa is a form of suicide?

Yes, sannyasa is a form of suicide. Anyone who wants to commit suicide must immediately take sannyasa because sannyasa means death, and also new life – rebirth. What is suicide? And what is the difference between suicide and a normal death? When you die against your wishes, that is called death, and when you make a conscious decision to die, that is suicide.

I was born in 1923 from my mother's womb, that was the birth of this physical body. But I was born from my guru in 1947 when I took sannyasa. I made the decision to die, so I committed suicide. I abandoned my attachment to this body. I also renounced my religion, my cultural traditions and my old habits and I was initiated into a whole new system of life.

Anyone who considers self-assassination should, without thinking, take to sannyasa and let his old self die. He should live with a guru for a few years, work hard with him and let the whole pattern of his life be restructured.

How do you see the development of yoga in the 1980s?

Yoga has a very great future and it can play a major role in uplifting society in the coming twenty-first century. Once people thought that religion could deliver the desired goods,

but that was a great disappointment. Then they hoped that a political system would create an order of peace, understanding and amity, but again they were disappointed. Now it is the turn of yoga.

People are realizing that unless the individual changes, unless there is a transformation in the root of man's nature, nothing tangible will be achieved for a long time. Therefore, from the point of view of society, from the aspect of therapy and spiritual attainments, yoga certainly has a great future.



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Religion

If I want to get involved in yoga will I have to give up my religion?

Religion is your personal affair. You have to think for yourself whether it is necessary for you or not. It is not up to anyone else. You are wearing glasses. It is not for me to tell you to throw them away. You have to decide whether they are necessary for you or not. If you think the glasses are not powerful enough, then go to an optician and have them changed, but I cannot tell you to throw them away. You have on a warm woollen sweater. Maybe you don't really need it, but I can't tell you to throw it away. You can throw it away if you like, change it or continue wearing it, but no one else can tell you to do it. Religion is absolutely personal and nobody has anything to do with it except you and God.

Would you say that yoga is not a religion, but that it develops religious consciousness?

Yoga is definitely not a religion; it is a science. It is based on facts and figures, and it is immediately and intimately concerned with the body and mind. Yet at the same time, those people who want to have the inner experience and feel that other ways of realization have failed can definitely groom their minds through the practice of yoga.

Yoga confers clarity of mind and controls the behaviour of the mind in all its manifestations. One who wants to live a

religious life can fully utilize the benediction of yoga. However, for one who is not religious, who has no faith in religion and does not want it at all, but who wants to have a healthy body, a peaceful mind and a life dedicated to a particular purpose, yoga is definitely the means.

Just as you can purchase anything you want from the market if you have bank notes, in the same way, with clarity of mind and control over the consciousness, you can go ahead with your aspirations and live your life in fullness.

Do people abroad have difficulty accepting yoga due to their religious beliefs?

If such difficulties occur, it is very unfortunate. It means we lack wisdom and common sense, whether we are Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis or Communists. I have never had any difficulty in any country with Om chanting or Gayatri mantra, and most of the countries I visit are wholly Christian or wholly Muslim. Even in a place like Belfast where Catholics and Protestants are ready to shoot each other, the people are right at home with *Om*, Gayatri or *Om Namah Shivaya*. They know that yoga is a science and not a religion.

Introducing yoga to European countries is not that difficult. In Latin America the people are staunch Catholics, absolutely orthodox. However, from a few programs we did with the monks and nuns, they learned that yoga can definitely help them. During an asana and pranayama seminar I conducted for them, I found that within a week or fifteen days, yoga was able to solve their emotional problems and give them better control over their personal lives. Most of them asked me about the same subject, "Do you ever fall ill?" I said, "No." They asked, "How did you learn about diseases?" I told them I had read about them. They asked, "Do you ever take medicine?" "No," I answered. "Are you against medicines?" they asked. "No," I replied, "I am not against medicines." Then I asked them, "Do you ever take medicines?" "Oh yes, daily," they answered. I asked them what they took them for and they replied, "For insomnia, indigestion, headache

and other pains.” I told them, “Well, you don’t need them anymore.”

I am talking about elderly monks and nuns who have led a life of total suppression, and at the age of sixty-five these suppressions have developed into gout, rheumatism, peptic ulcers, insomnia, nocturnal emissions, etc. In fifteen days they were greatly relieved of all these problems.

So, I think asanas, pranayama, mantras and other practices should be viewed from the point of view of science, not religion.

Why do so many religions and philosophical cults and systems collapse when their founder dies?

Because they are dreams that become shattered. They disintegrate because they lack tradition. Why does your country still exist? Because it has a tradition. If there is no tradition, there will not be any perpetual existence. Most cults and philosophies have no tradition they only have a powerful leader; therefore; they disintegrate when he goes. This always happens. The dreams of all great people have been completely shattered by their followers.

This is the age of the individual. It is the age of balanced participation and that is why monarchs have gone. Dictatorships are going, and wherever they still exist people don’t like them. Spiritual, religious and political movements are appropriate for our age and for people like us who think. There must be balanced participation of all individuals and we are very happy to see this growing. However, we are still hoping that someone will be able to survive it.

What is the nature of God?

God is an experience. The entire existence, the whole creation, seen and unseen, is permeated by the divine principle. As I see it, there would be no point in a universe which is devoid of this divine principle. Man is very fortunate in that he is able to think about God. Other things in this world are permeated through and through by this divine principle, but they are not aware

of it. Man has become aware of it and he has been developing this awareness since human civilization began.

Now man has arrived at the conclusion that there is a divine experience which is very different from the mental experience of pain and pleasure, from the emotional experience of love and hate, from the sleep experience. After having that divine experience, man no longer remains an experiencer, just as when salt merges in water it becomes one with the water. In the same way, when the experiencer experiences the non-empirical experience called the divine experience, he no longer exists as what we call an ordinary experiencer. The knower of Brahman, the knower of God, becomes God. He loses his individuality, his limitations. That is the divine experience when it becomes personified.

For me, that is God because it is the only final thing I can apprehend. I cannot apprehend God in any human form. Although I know that he is immanent in everyone and everything, I know that he is beyond also. At the same time I think it is good to have respect, devotion, submission and surrender to any human being in the form of guru, saviour, emancipator or spiritual guide.

If you were to ask what is the real form of God at the point of realization, some would say light and others knowledge. I think the best word is experience, but experience of what? Experience of totality, experience of oneness, one without a second. That experience cannot be described. If you have eaten mangoes and I have never tasted them, you are not going to be able to explain their taste to me. Even if you were to write a big thesis on mangoes, without tasting them I would not be able to understand. In the same manner, if I have experienced God and you have not experienced it, I can never explain it and you can never understand.

If God is in everything, is that the same as universal consciousness? Is atheism also a kind of religion?

Theism is a belief in the existence of a personal God. Atheism is an act of repudiation of this faith. Atheism has many shades,

but mostly we understand an atheist to be one who does not believe in a personal God. Apart from that you have sceptics, agnostics and many other schools of atheism.

To believe in a universal consciousness is not theism, because those who believe in God believe in God as a dictator, but, in fact, this cannot be correct. There is balanced participation by many elements in the process of creation, preservation and destruction. Even the universal consciousness is not a dictator; it is a state of individual experience. When the mind expands, its experiences are very different from those that one has at any normal moment of life. This homogeneity of experience cannot be God. If people want to equate God with this homogeneous experience, then I think it is better that they define their God in a different way.

Atheism is a process of continuous discovery. An atheist is one who is searching and seeking and trying to find out the status of reality. An atheist is never satisfied with the usual explanations that are given, and he does not take any reply for granted. A theist is one who simply takes anything as the final truth and judgement. He does not question; he does not discover the truth for himself; he just accepts. Therefore, atheism cannot be a religion. Religion is a belief you accept. If you don't accept, it can't be a religion. It is a philosophy, a process of practical discovery. Atheism is a science and theism is a religion.

When we pray to God is anyone listening?

Well, according to raja yoga, working on the more or less psychological technicalities, it is said that you listen to your own prayers. That is subjective. According to bhakti yoga, the listener is not you; you being the personal, coloured you. In my opinion there is a higher self in you that is listening apart from this little self.

Please speak to us on prayer.

Prayer has two forms. In one form you express the feelings of your heart before the Supreme Being which is in you. And

the second form of prayer is when you sing a prayer from the scriptures which is pleasing to you.

The psychology of prayer is very important for everyone to understand. Prayer is one of the most powerful ways to give expression to suppressed emotions and forms of your mind. You can express to yourself all those things which you cannot tell anybody. During prayer, the higher being of the spiritual consciousness is a symbol which you create or which you bring in front of you, then you offer the totality of the expression of your heart to That. Through this the mind becomes purified and relaxed.

When the mind is relaxed, then the physical body relaxes. The tensions in different parts of the body, including the heart, abate. Therefore, prayer has an immediate meaning and absolute relevance to one's everyday life, but when you talk about spiritual enlightenment through prayer, then the prayer has a much deeper significance.

When a yogi retires from the affairs of life and enters into silence, he is within his own self, uniting with or trying to unite with his own being. That is also a prayer. You might have read that Christ used to take his disciples into seclusion to pray. Now, what was their prayer? It was not a prayer that we sing in the temples or the church. Christ was actually taking his disciples into retreat to practise communication with the inner self. That was the prayer.

Whereas some people believe that prayer means asking for something, we should understand the other meaning of prayer as well; not asking for something, but communicating with one's own inner being. Not everybody can do this because they do not know the way. You can try it, but you may not be able to do it. You may succeed intellectually, but intellectual communication is of no significance. Inner communication is not a process of thinking, "I'll close my eyes and try to think that I'm with God and I am one with God." That's surely hypnosis. And that's what most of us have been doing.

Prayer, whether it's asking for anything or communication with the inner self, is not conducted through the medium of

the mind. It is purely an expression of one's inner feelings. I'm not talking about sentiments, and I don't know if the word 'feeling' can convey what I mean to express. In bhakti we call it *bhavana*, which means the 'expression of your inner being'. What is the expression of your inner being? We call it devotion. The expression of the mind, emotions or passions is called sentiment.

Therefore, because communication with the inner self is extremely difficult, the saints and sages have composed prayers. Actually, they did not compose the prayers, they revealed them when they were in the higher spirit. It is the poets and ordinary people like us who have composed the prayers.

In the beginning an aspirant has to take the help of these prayers to conduct his own feelings. But there comes a moment when words fail and language is of no avail, expressions become mute, there is a total feeling. You know how, during moments of extreme suffering or joy, expression fails and you do not know what to say or express. When the dualities of consciousness are about to fuse into each other and you are in absolute communication, then these external prayers will not have any significance or relevance.

So now let me say that prayer has two forms, one in which you express and one in which you don't. In the second one, silence is a form of prayer. In the first, words and feelings are the forms of prayer.

What is the relationship between the great religions, and to what extent can their beliefs and practices be reconciled?

All great religions are ways to expand the aim and the path, the goal and the way to the goal. The founders of the religions were great yogis, highly enlightened souls who had the vision of the Supreme. They saw the light and they gathered disciples around them and taught them certain practices. The disciples handed the practices down, and this is how the religions grew up. Later, every religion established a church, a hierarchy that had much more to do with institutionalism than with the actual practices.

The religious founders, the great mahatmas, rishis and divine persons we read about were all of the same rank and achievement, and what they realized was the same spiritual being. But as for the institutions, like the Christian Church, Islam and the Jewish religion, there are certainly differences, and it must be so on the social plane. But as far as the realization of the founders is concerned, I see no difference.

If one cannot accept the Christian, Hindu, Muslim or any other practice of institutional spirituality, but nevertheless feels the need for the meditative discipline and practices of yoga, is one acceptable as a disciple, and can one be considered as a yoga aspirant?

Yoga is not concerned with the various religions. Tantra, the system from which yoga evolved, is much older than the Vedas, the books from which Hinduism has developed. So yoga is more ancient than Hinduism itself.

What happened was that the science of yoga was kept alive in India where the people practised Hinduism. Just because the technological sciences were discovered by great thinkers who were Christians does not mean that they are Christian sciences. Nor would I have any objection if you asked me to study chemistry, biology, botany, or any of the sciences which were perfected by those scientists who were born as Christians. In the same way, although the practices of yoga were protected, nourished and taught by Hindu thinkers, by no means should they be considered a Hindu science. One should be able to accept yoga as a science.

What influence have Christianity and the Bible had on the world?

I have studied Christianity and have found it has had a good influence on humanity. It is definitely a superior religion. I am not talking about the church, the Pope and the clergy. I am talking about the tenets of Christianity. They have definitely had a very positive, tender and compassionate influence on humanity. But when all that is said, a religion

is always controlled by a church and a hierarchy, and they can never be sincere. The people involved have their own vested interests, their own ignorant ideologies, their own idiosyncrasies and perverted associations with politics.

Long ago there were practices in the Christian religion which are similar to those of yoga. However, they are not known today. When I read the Bible I understand it differently and I have tried to interpret the statements made there. They have the same connotations as we have in yoga, for example, 'dark night of the soul'. Now, a clergyman or a cardinal may not understand what this means, but I know because I have had the experience in a particular stage of sadhana. This and other similar statements in the Bible refer to the deeper states of human consciousness. But unfortunately the clergy and the people don't understand.

It is only during the last ten or fifteen years, since yoga has penetrated the West, that the biblical scholars have been trying to strike a comparison between the statements of the Bible and yoga. I tell them that unless they practise it, they cannot know it. Yoga cannot be interpreted through the intellect. It can only be interpreted through experience.

Please tell us a little about Hinduism?

The first thing is that Hinduism is not a religion at all. Hinduism is a federation of faiths. There are so many religions in India today which are affiliated to the Hindu federation, and after a few centuries more will be affiliated. Why? Because Hinduism believes in acceptance and not rejection, inclusion not exclusion.

As such, Hinduism is not a particular religion, it is the name of the family of all the religions in India. That is how the Shaivites, Shaktas, Vaishnavites, tantrics, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and many more live in India like a family with its differences. They all have their own peculiarities, their own understanding and their own purposes, but they tolerate and accept each other.

Today, there are only two religions which have not become a part of Hinduism – Christianity and Islam, but they will

also have to flow into it because ultimately they are the same. The ultimate aim of Hindus, Christians and Muslims can't be different. It is one and the same.

The Hindu concept of spirituality considers self-realization as the ultimate, while Christianity believes in giving oneself to the Church. Which view is correct?

Self-realization is the cultivation of a particular faculty which helps you become broad, wide and great. Your knowledge is taken beyond the frontiers of the mind and senses, and then you serve mankind. If you have ten rupees, you can only give ten rupees, but if you have one thousand, you can give one thousand. If you are more capable, you can do more to help people. So, with spiritual enlightenment, you have more to contribute and you can help more people.

Christ helped many people. There were others living at that time who had the same intention, but could they help? A person who has realized the self is in a better position to help man come through his difficulties. Man's consciousness is bound by the fetters of ignorance and no one but one who has realized God can bring him out of it. A God-realized saint who is equipped with greater vision and mental power can definitely help man much more, perhaps even instigating positive and permanent changes.

You can serve mankind, give medicine, education, food, clothing, employment or whatever you like, but there are other forms of help that no one can provide. Today man is unhappy, dissatisfied, completely lonely and broken. Who is going to bring him out of all this? Give him a house, a job, security, medical facilities, create insurance for him. Does that make any change in his spiritual or psychological structure? You know the situation; there are countries standing as evidence in the world today. No matter how much material help you provide, man still remains unhappy. As such we have to accept both the Hindu view of God-realization and the Christian view of service to mankind.

What are the main reasons for the decline of Buddhism in India? And what is the main difference between Buddhism and Hinduism of which it is supposed to be an offshoot?

Well, Buddhism did not decline in India, because Buddha was the ninth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. He came in order to raise man from cruelty to love and compassion. There was a time in history when the kings used to invade other countries and when they came back they were worshipped. Today, if a king invades another country, he is regarded as a bandit and criticized. All compliments to Lord Buddha and his philosophy.

Buddha was actually not a religious preacher. He was not even a teacher of morality. He was, in our belief, an atheist. He opposed every existing religious law in India. He rebuked rituals, beliefs, customs and traditions. He not only refused to accept the ordinary traditions but he rejected spiritual traditions. Buddha taught just one thing: meditation, *dhyana*. Wherever he went he used to conduct only meditation, and thousands of laymen and ascetic disciples used to practise it. Of course, Buddha was a swami, and it is a custom in India that householders go to a swami for guidance in their spiritual and everyday lives. So he advised them according to the current situation of the day. But what happens after the death of such great people? Their disciples start making an organization and that becomes a religion.

Buddhism as a religion may have mingled with thousands of branches of vedic dharma. It has not ended either in India or in any other country. No philosophy, no dharma, no religion has been lost in India. All have been affiliated into this great current called vedic dharma. So it is with Buddhism.

From what have I read, it seems the early Christians were filled with love, peace and other divine qualities. I have seen these qualities in the Indian swamis who come to the West, but I never see them in Christians. What is it that Christians have lost?

In India, the swamis live a very austere life for ten to twelve years. They live a life of self-imposed poverty, chastity and

absolute obedience to their guru. They don't eat meat, they don't take alcohol, fat or oil. They live in seclusion as renunciates, they practise yoga and they control their thoughts. They don't associate with politics and they live as simply and as naturally as possible. That is why they have brilliance of the spirit.

Do you know how saints such as St Francis of Assisi, St Paul, St Andreas, St Domingo and other early Christians lived? They did not stay in monasteries; they lived all alone in small huts and practised many austerities. You must have heard of the Athenian cynic named Dionysus, who lived in a wine barrel. People thought he was crazy, but he was great. How did Socrates live? Did he stay in a monastery? He used to have quarrels with his wife every day. All saints suffered in some way. They suffered physically and they suffered for others. They lived in poverty and they purified their bodies by fasting and penance. That is why they used to beam with great brilliance.

Please remember that saints are never Hindu or Christian. They are not classified like that. I was born into a Hindu family, but I am not a Hindu. If I had been born into a Christian family, I would not be a Christian today. That confines me. I am not a Hindu, a Christian, a Muslim, an Indian or an Arab. I am not a man or a woman. I am the self, self, self.

Ashram Life

What is the basic concept of ashram life?

The basic concept of ashram rallies around the idea of hard work. The word ashram is derived from the root *shram*, which means 'labour'. There are two types of labour going on continuously in the ashram. The spiritual effort we make for the evolution of our self is hard work, and at the same time, the physical work we contribute in ashram life is also for our evolution. Right from the beginning, ashram life was organized under the guru or preceptor. Monastic and lay disciples came to live with the guru for a long or short period and lived a very simple, uniform type of life.

In ancient days, even kings and emperors used to visit ashrams and live like ordinary ashramites. Ashrams were designed in such a way that there was utter simplicity in their structure, and in this simplicity everybody, rich or poor, found their answers. A person from a poor home or a person from an aristocratic background found a new life and joy there, participating in the ashram activities.

If one lived in the ashram for some time, one had an opportunity to see oneself, and at the same time one developed greater confidence in oneself. A lot of psychological problems, including complexes and lack of confidence, can be mended by living in an ashram for a short period of time.

The beauty of ashram life is that since everybody is enthusiastically participating in the activities and trying to enjoy

them, work becomes contagious and voluntary. The guru is there, definitely, but he is not the director of the activities, he is the source of inspiration and only that. This is how ashram life goes on in a very beautiful and orderly fashion.

Will you please tell us a little about the daily life in your ashram?

Ashram life is absolutely different from any other way of life in the world. Just as you don't require air-conditioners where the climate is cold, or central heating systems in tropical countries such as India, when you live in an ashram, you don't need to practise any spiritual sadhana. Yoga should be practised where the entire life pattern is unyogic. If you have the right type of ashram life and additionally you do the yoga practices, you are only exerting yourself.

The ashram wakes up by three am, and up to five am all the inmates are busy cleaning and doing a little bit of study or writing work that I personally give them. All day people in the ashram are engaged in practical, manual work. We have created a lot of work in order to keep the mind properly occupied, and all the inmates of the ashram are busy in those self-created activities.

There is no religious insistence and life is conducted in a very simple way without any moral emphasis. Food, activities and mutual interactions are based on natural things. As I am not a religious person most people who live with me are also not religious. They are a mixture of Hindus, Christians, Jews, Buddhists and Muslims, but most of them are disillusioned by religion. We have no religious celebrations in the ashram.

The thing which people in the ashram like best is singing kirtan at night. Most people participate in that although it is not compulsory. The most compulsory thing in the ashram is getting up at three am and retiring to your room at eight pm. Even eating is not compulsory; you need not eat if you don't feel like it. Ashram life is difficult, but it is worth trying once.

How is ashram life beneficial for householders?

In an ashram the lifestyle and diet are very simple, so simple that sometimes it is difficult for aspirants. Anything which is too comfortable makes the willpower weak. By *tapasya* or hardship, the mind becomes strong. That is why householders are supposed to go to sannyasa ashrams every year and stay there for a month. It is in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, and once upon a time it was also in Christianity.

Every householder should live in an ashram like a sannyasi for a certain period of time; that makes one strong. Ashram life is also very important for children. It teaches them to live freely in a community with an absolutely clear outlook. Then when they grow up, this experience serves as a very positive influence in their life.

What is the importance of singing in an ashram and how are the songs selected?

Singing and music are a very important part of spiritual life, as music has an influence on the mind, emotions, nervous system and body. Certain types of music make one inactive and opiated, whereas other types of music stimulate one to the point of passion and excitement. There is also a type of music called kirtan which soothes the nerves and gives peace of mind and renewed energy. This kirtan should be the repetition of some words for a period of five or ten minutes, and you should follow the harmony and rhythm of the music, beginning from the point of tranquillity and leading up to a point of activity.

Why is kirtan so powerful?

Kirtan has a wonderful effect on the atmosphere. It is like waving a stick of incense on the subtle plane, making it fragrant. Kirtan is better than Om chanting. Singing kirtan clears away all the complexes, fears, worries and confusions. It is the best way to relax.

Please speak about the purpose of interpersonal conflict in ashram life?

In ashram life interpersonal conflicts are very minor events. They do not penetrate deep into the consciousness. However, it is through personality clashes and conflicts that we come to know our selves and others much better. Initially, when people come to the ashram, they do not want conflicts, and being unable to face or understand them, they do their level best to avoid them. But after some time they get used to them and realize that everyone has a different nature and personality and they should be free to express it.

Ashram life is designed in such a way that these conflicts do arise just as they would anywhere else in the world. But by and by we understand their reality and purpose, and we no longer mind them. If there is conflict between you and him, you understand that he has his own nature and you have your own, but still you love him and he loves you. You see that love, union, relationships, the practical affairs of life and the day-to-day activities of the ashram can continue in spite of differences and conflicts. In time, everybody realizes that conflict is an inevitable law of evolution.

Why should there not be conflicts in ashram life? There is conflict going on everywhere, in all parts of the world and in all cultures and communities. Conflict not only occurs amongst humans, it also takes place in the animal kingdom and in every sphere of nature. Even in your physical body the chemicals, hormones and serums are all in constant conflict with each other. And as well as this, the three qualities of one's nature, sattwa, rajas and tamas, are always in conflict. So let us understand that conflict is an inevitable part of evolution. It is not something that should be dreaded.

If people can understand the inevitability of conflict, perhaps the family system will improve. You know, in the Hindu joint families, just before marriage, all children are taught one very important thing. Differences and conflicts are necessary. You must understand them, adjust accordingly and utilize them. So, whenever there are conflicts in family

life or ashram life, you must be ready to utilize them for your gain. This is what I do.

Why do you have men and women staying in the same ashram?

I don't think men and women should be separated. God has not done it, so why should I? Separate facilities are all that is necessary. At the same time, we do not form attachments and personal relationships, because it is far better to live an independent life within the ashram. We work together, that's all. We are neither brother nor sister, husband nor wife, parent nor child. We have no relations with each other. I am not half and you are not half. I am one and you are one. I want you to be a complete unit. That is how one has to grow.

This reorientation towards one another may take decades or even centuries. The old cultures and religions have not succeeded in changing man's limited attitudes and views of the opposite sex. Today there are still many weak men and women in the world. In the ashram, therefore, we have to learn to live together with full knowledge and a new awareness, just like a snake charmer.

You know, when you are worried and anxious, you use more energy, but when you carry a big tree with this girl or this boy, you use a lot less energy. Community life with hard work is good, but not two swamis sitting together, talking and talking.

Please tell us something about the children living in the ashram.

I will tell you about the children living in my Australian ashram at Mangrove Mountain. Most of them came to the ashram when their parents took sannyasa. They are very peculiar children, strong in inclination and completely different from their parents. They have to attend school because it is compulsory by Australian law, but they are sannyasins first. The teachers find them to be very intelligent, open and disciplined. They never use bad words or talk about television. Whenever the teachers get angry, the children tell them, "Please practise yoga."

All these children have shaved heads, and as soon as they get back to the ashram in the afternoon they throw off their shirts and pants and put on geru. One girl of six years said, "Oh, we don't want to read, we prefer to cook food at the ashram." They are happy on Saturdays and Sundays as they can play all day and help prepare food for the hundred or more people in the ashram. When the children go to the forest to collect firewood, they come back dirty from head to toe. If anyone asks them why they are so dirty, they reply, "Naturopathy." Indeed, children like ashram life so much that some of them come to live here before their parents. One little girl stayed in the ashram for two years before her mother and father came to join her.

Why is the ashram so austere?

I have visited some of the ultra-modern ashrams in India, but I do not believe in them. Although I have had opportunities to create a modern ashram I have purposely not done so. People come to the ashram for a change. When you leave modern society for a more austere way of life, you undergo a great metamorphosis in body and mind.

We have a very big ashram in Australia, sixty miles out of Sydney. There are no sealed roads for miles around, and there are pythons in the forest. For four years the ashram did not have electricity, and although we can build beautiful houses there, we chose to construct small mud-brick huts. There is no necessity for elaborate living quarters, electricity, hot water or septic toilets.

Maybe we live a backward way of life, but perhaps modern culture is also backward. Modern amenities make you dependent and lazy; you don't even have to think. You use a bathroom without thought or effort. You live like robots. In the ashram you can't live like robots; you have to think. When you live in luxury your brain becomes very slow, but an austere life promotes a very active brain. Remember that a great metamorphosis will only take place in the brain if you undergo a real change.

I also think that separate rooms do not give us the opportunity to see where we stand with one another. If a group of people live together, they begin to understand the nature of human psychology. They are able to assess their own minds, their limitations and their faults, which is a great change from the isolation of the modern culture.

What is your idea of a beautiful ashram?

The ashram should be constructed along simple lines by the sannyasins and inmates. It should be situated in an out of the way place where there are many difficulties. At times there should be cyclones, typhoons or floods and extreme heat or cold. Sometimes it should be pleasant and at other times very suffocating. This is my concept of an ashram, and a very beautiful ashram. This is how God decorated nature.

How can a householder create an ashram atmosphere in the home?

The purpose of household life is not to amass desires and ambitions, but to exhaust them and get rid of the net of maya while performing one's duties. A greater number of ashrams, monasteries, churches and temples cannot accelerate the pace of human evolution until and unless the spirit of these places is imbibed by the householders as much as possible in their day-to-day life.

If you find a better way of life in the ashram, you have to imbibe that spirit and bring it down into family life. Householders must practise yoga, simplify their lives, and create a system of harmony, orderliness and discipline within the precincts of family life. The life of a householder can become sublime if you keep in mind the ultimate purpose of human life.

Swamiji, if we come to this ashram after you have left our country, what will we find here?

When a diver dives into the sea, what is he going to get? When you begin to explore the mind, what are you going to

discover there? If you are a seeker you should know what you are looking for.

In my opinion, you come to the ashram in order to be a part of its atmosphere. Hundreds of people come and they contribute to the mighty potential and magnetic sphere of the place. Besides this, a lot of work can be done. Books on yoga can be translated, published and distributed. After getting yourself trained in yoga you can spread out to different places and teach yoga to children in schools, to pregnant women in hospitals, to prisoners in jails. There are so many structures in society where you can go to talk about and teach yoga.

When can we come to your Munger ashram and how do we go about it?

If you wish to visit the Bihar School of Yoga, you can fly to Delhi and connect to a domestic flight to Patna. From there you take a taxi or train to Munger. Please drop us a letter of advice and you may then come and stay as long as you wish. April, May and June are very hot in Munger. July and August are monsoon months and in September everything is flooded. So the best time to stay for a temporary visit is in the cooler months from November to January. Even February and March are pleasant, though a little warmer.

Unless there are seminars in progress, tuition is individual, one or two people in a class. Those staying for a longer period may have access to the library to do research into any yogic subject. If you are dynamic, you can join in the routine of the ashram and do karma yoga. But please remember that the ashram in Munger is rather primitive. Even though there are people staying there from all parts of the world, the facilities remain basic.

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Sannyasa

Swamiji, please tell us how the tradition of sannyasa originated.

Sannyasa is the oldest order of mankind. It is older than Christianity, Buddhism and many other cultures of the world. In every period of history a certain type of person went out of society and lived alone in an environment where they could simplify their lifestyles and habits. These people were dedicated to the path of truth and knowledge. They organized small communities and lived very peaceful lives. Many seekers of truth came to them for guidance. Some of them became swamis, and after their initial period of training, they went to their respective places and organized similar communities where like-minded people could come and stay. They formulated a few simple rules to make spiritual life more powerful: no personal property or wealth, no relationships and family ties, no marriage, and simple living conditions with minimum comfort. Thus the tradition of sannyasa began.

You will always find people in society who do not want to live a normal family life. But when they live in the family with others, they automatically become involved. Then they are greatly disappointed and frustrated and don't know what to pursue in life. The sannyasa order was created and maintained for people who did not want to live with their family, who did not want to lead a married life or have any personal

involvement with or attachment to anyone. Sannyasa was formulated for those who wanted to follow their own spiritual path independent of any religious background.

Isn't sannyasa only for old people who have fulfilled all worldly desires?

According to the Vedas, a person's lifespan was divided into four ashramas. *Brahmacharya ashrama*, or student life, was the first and it continued until the age of twenty-five. Then came *grihastha ashrama*, or householder life until fifty. Next came *vanaprastha ashrama*, when husband and wife retired to the forest and started to prepare for the final stage of sannyasa, which commenced at seventy-five. However, as far as history goes, this retirement plan has never worked. It is impractical. Try to become a sannyasin after seventy-five and see how difficult it is. And what am I going to teach you, celibacy? That's what the Vedas recommend.

So, in time, people realized that sannyasa was an attitude, a particular personality in man. One could be a sannyasin even during their teens, in the prime of youth. It could be one's dharma, a samskara which one brought with them from a previous incarnation. This developed a higher type of awareness where one doesn't want to engage oneself in the life of a householder, but would rather live as a sannyasin. This can happen to anyone at any time.

There is a story about Shukadeva, who became the author of *Srimad Bhagavata*, the life of Sri Krishna. Shuka, as he was known then, was full of vairagya and had the consciousness of sannyasa at a very young age. His father, who was also a great author of classical Hindu literature, tried to convince Shuka not to renounce. He reminded him of the traditional order in which one could not take sannyasa until the age of seventy-five. But Shuka said, "What's the certainty that I will live to be seventy-five?" and he left his home and family to become a sannyasin.

I think that in advanced age you do not really become detached, you just grow tired. When you are tired, your senses

are completely squeezed of energy. It's not that you don't want things, it's simply that you don't have the energy for them anymore.

So vedic sannyasa has been the basis of the tradition, and new ideas have been added to it during the period of Mahavira, Buddha and Shankaracharya. I believe Shankaracharya was the founder of the type of sannyasa we have accepted.

Is it possible to be initiated and live as a householder sannyasin?

Frankly speaking, a householder is as good as a sannyasin. As far as I have analyzed, the life of a householder, if it is led with a spiritual point of view, is a life of constant self-purification, self-correction and continual growth into the area of vastness and infinity.

In order to be initiated into sannyasa, it is very necessary that you have either fulfilled your ambitions of being a householder, or you don't have them at all. If you want to fulfil your life as a householder, then enter spiritual life as a householder.

Sannyasa is not the only path to self-realization. There are two different ways. One is known as the path of involvement, the other is known as the path of retirement. There are some people who are definitely fit for sannyasa and unfit for being a householder. It is for those people that the life of sannyasa is ideal. They can simply give themselves completely to spiritual growth and awareness. But if you find you have plenty of samskaras to attend to, and a lot of psycho-emotional and physical obligations to fulfil, then there is no need for you to be disappointed and think that spiritual life is closed to you. No, it is not like that. The highest point of spiritual life is obtainable by both sannyasins and householders.

According to the great masters, the only difference between the two paths is that the path of retirement is only for a few, whereas the path of involvement is for the majority. Involvement is an experience, and it is also a way to disillusionment.

Those people who have passions and desires have to get involved in them, as only then will they be disillusioned by them and realize that they are only temporary and transient. So therefore, I cannot agree that one could be half sannyasin and half householder. It is far better if you become a full sannyasin or accept the spiritual path of a householder.

How does the way of a swami differ from the life we know?

Swami literally means ‘master of one’s own self’. Swami does not mean a monk, priest or a religious personality. Swami is a self-master; nobody owns him and he does not own anybody. When you have a house, husband or wife, children, etc., then there is ownership. In the life of a swami, there is no idea of ownership. Even if he is at the head of a large ashram or institution with plenty of money, it doesn’t belong to him, much less to his relatives. It is institutional, not personal. That is the ideal of a swami. For instance, my guru, Swami Sivananda, left nothing in his personal name when he died. His ability, capacity and potential were all used for the welfare of everyone and not for himself personally. This is the spirit of renunciation in sannyasa.

In worldly life, however, most people suffer from insecurity. So in order to establish themselves, they have the frame of family, religion, nationality, caste, group, culture or society. They believe in all of these and secure themselves with a house, industry, economic status, property in their name, and a will in the name of their wife and children. They never let go because they are insecure. However, sannyasa is just the opposite. When you have realized that worldly life has not given you satisfaction, then you accept sannyasa, a life of total insecurity.

There are people who have greater intelligence and competence. They are rich in mind and potential and need a higher path in life through which to express themselves. If you have an elephant, you have to have somewhere to put it. If you keep it in a small room, either the elephant will die or

the room will collapse. For one born to be a sannyasin, the life of a householder is like keeping an elephant confined in a small room.

If you feed a tiger with salad, just imagine what will happen to it. Salad is not the food of a tiger. In the same way, there are people who want to live a different type of life because their heart is not able to accept the slavery of custom. Whereas most people are the slaves of their mind and senses, a swami is able to control himself. A swami knows how to conduct his emotions, jealousies, prides and prejudices, and how to keep his mind balanced. Even when all appears to be going wrong around him, he is able to maintain tranquillity.

Why do sannyasins wear geru?

Firstly, because it is necessary from the viewpoint of an order or organization. Sannyasins in this country have been wearing geru right from the beginning. The geru colour is a symbol of detachment and total dedication. It also represents the calm, peaceful, serene dynamism in one's own personality.

Geru is a very natural colour which comes from a type of soft stone. It contains traces of radioactivity which help to protect the human body. In the early days, when sannyasins used to live in the forests, they clothed themselves in geru to help maintain the absoluteness of their physical health.

Nowadays, when we wear geru, it represents our spiritual tradition and symbolizes our renunciation. When we travel by train, people automatically recognize it and come to us to discuss matters concerning their spiritual life, and thus they get peace of mind.

Why do sannyasins shave their head?

The custom of shaving the head is not only peculiar to sannyasins, it is one of the most ancient traditions of India, and it has also been practised throughout the world. Nowadays they even do it in the West as well. People shave their heads and put on wigs.

Christian monks and nuns used to be under a compulsory obligation to shave, but now in many countries they are not. Hindu children have complete shaving when they are three or four years old. Then at eight years, another shaving is done. When they take diksha, their first initiation, a third shaving is done. Then when the nearest family member dies, there is another shaving, and when the ceremony for the dead is performed, they also shave. Besides this, if they take sannyasa, they must shave.

Behind the idea of shaving is the fact that the hair repels the cosmic energy that should come in contact with the higher region of our body. So the head is shaved in order to have a direct communication with the cosmic energy.

Another reason for shaving the head is that it is easier and more practical to take care of. Sannyasins and sannyasinis living in extreme conditions would have all sorts of bugs living in their hair if they didn't shave. To take care of your hair properly you need to use shampoo and other nice smelling things. Otherwise you will smell just like a wet dog. Have you ever smelled a wet dog? One that's just come in from the rain? If you stop using soaps and perfumes on your hair for a month, you'll smell just like that.

So due to these practical viewpoints, it has always been suggested that a sannyasin should have his hair completely cropped. It is also necessary for a sannyasin or sannyasini to throw away certain complexes and physical attachments. To the conditioned mind hair represents beauty, but to the unconditioned mind the shaved sannyasins also look beautiful.

Is it necessary to give up my religion in order to become a swami?

Is it necessary to give up your religion to become a professor of chemistry? Is it necessary to renounce your religion if you want to master any sport? Is it necessary for a painter, a musician, a scientist or an explorer to kick his religion? No, not at all. Religion is your socio-political identity, even if you don't believe in it. If you are French, you have to be a Frenchman.

That's your nationality. I am an Indian, so I have to be an Indian. That's my political identity. So religion is a person's socio-political identity, and he can maintain it at all costs, no matter which profession he chooses and which philosophy he follows. Even if he is an atheist, he's a Christian atheist! Well, that's how things are today.

A socio-political creed is given to people from time to time. The political situation of the country might change after five hundred years. Islam might come in, or maybe Buddhism or Communism. Who are you then? The socio-political identity is not eternal in nature. It has changed throughout history. But a swami is one who is above all this. He does not get involved with politics, morality or ethics.

So a Catholic, a Hindu, a Muslim, anybody can be a swami. Even if you don't believe in God, still you can be a swami. Regardless of religion, everybody wants to know the truth.

Is it necessary for sannyasins to renounce the world? Couldn't they still serve humanity if they stayed in society?

If Swami Vivekananda had not renounced, he would have been a good professor or intellectual. That would have been his contribution to society, but when he became Swami Vivekananda, he was able to serve society on a greater scale. It is the same with Sri Aurobindo. He could have also been a professor, an excellent lawyer or a journalist, but when he became Sri Aurobindo, his contribution to society could never be compared to what he would have done as a professor or lawyer.

With the coming of Swami Vivekananda, Swami Sivananda and other swamis of our age, another dimension was added to sannyasa; a creative life, a period which is advantageous to you and other sannyasins. You are able to give expression to all your talents for the sake of the community or humanity, whether as an artist, musician, writer, builder, administrator, teacher or speaker.

How do you think sannyasins such as Swami Sivananda and Swami Vivekananda, Paramahansa Yogananda, Swami

Rama Tirtha and many others expressed their talents and creativity? Some created hospitals or gurukul ashrams, others gave a new philosophy, a new way of living, or a totally new definition to the whole life pattern. If they had remained in society, they would not have been able to express their creativity on such a grand scale and their energies would have been dispersed in many other areas.

Why don't sannyasins return home and teach their people how to live better lives through yoga?

After one has accepted sannyasa, he belongs to all, not to any particular group or individual. The rishis and sages who made the rules for sannyasa were very much aware of the limitations of the human personality. They knew that a sannyasin has a special role to play in society and that he has a special place in the heart of the people. But if he lives with his own relations, in his own village, the people will always be aware that he is their own son or brother or whatever relation he may be.

Therefore, the moment you take sannyasa, forget that you were born to a family, forget that you were meant to love or be loved. The sannyasin has a twofold duty; to develop self-awareness and at the same time to spread the spiritual influence to as many people as possible.

How should a sannyasin regard his parents? Should he renounce them or is a continuing relationship acceptable?

If a person develops the right spirit for sannyasa then everything happens by itself. You don't have to tell him what attitude he should have for his parents, his property or his personal possessions. Everything is fixed by itself because sannyasa is not a cult or a religion. It indicates a point, a milestone in spiritual growth.

Why must sannyasins leave the city and remain isolated in an ashram?

In the city, weak sannyasins have some difficulties, but in isolation they are helped by the situation. Just as a baby has

to have the right conditions around him so he can learn to adjust, similarly, conducive conditions have to be created for new sannyasins. Of course, these will not continue throughout life, but it takes time for the mind to become stable and for a sannyasin to become seasoned.

When you season wood, you can even use it on a riverbed and it will repel water. It does not rot or get eaten by insects, and it does not expand or contract so much. It is stable. Once the mind, body and emotions are stabilized, you will know where you are going and what you should do. Then you can roam freely like a mendicant and absolutely nothing will affect you. You can also teach yoga and effectively help many people.

You know what happens when you are exposed to society; you are influenced by friends and relatives who come to tell you so and so is married or divorced and this person wants to see you, etc. This may not affect all sannyasins, but it has adverse effects on some. When you are isolated from society, these things do not happen, and in the course of time the sannyasin develops sufficient detachment from these associations.

In the city you are still not very far from the old type of life, where there are so many temptations and so much maya. If you are not strong, you succumb to them, but if you are far away, even if the mind is tempted, it is not possible to satisfy it. In this way the negative aspects of the mind become weaker and weaker. When the mind becomes isolated like an island, it is able to conserve prana, which then becomes your spiritual power.

Can a sannyasin smoke?

This is a wonderful question. A sannyasin is not a monk, priest or holy man. He is a practitioner of yoga and the knower of the self. He has a free mind and pays no allegiance to any religion. If he likes he can smoke, but he should also have the strength not to smoke. If he is a slave of his habits, then he is finished. If you want to give me a cigarette, I can smoke

it even now. If a person has a free mind and if he has transcended addictions and has conquered attachments, he can do whatever he likes.

Remember one thing. You people of the West live in a world of contradictions. It is a paradox. In India, nobody asks me this question, but here everybody smokes and everybody asks if it is bad. The point is this, the mind has to be clear. If you smoke, smoke with confidence and faith. If you think it is bad, then don't touch cigarettes.

Could you please clarify why you give the title of swami to people who are not yet masters of their mind?

Most of the people who come to take sannyasa, in this ashram anyway, are very serious minded. They realize that sooner or later they will have to become master of the mind, but this requires a certain amount of preparation.

You know very well what society is like today. A sannyasin does not drop from heaven. He comes from your society. Even though he may not like to succumb to the temptations of the mind, still he has his own habits and conditioning. When he comes for sannyasa, he carries these with him. To drop these habits takes a long time and a hard, strict guru is absolutely necessary. But sooner or later, those who are sannyasins should be able to control their mind through their higher self.

Which is better for spiritual growth, householder or sannyasa life?

Which is the best way to Delhi, via Munger, Bombay, Calcutta or Madras? It depends where you are. If you're in Bombay you don't have to come to Munger. From Munger you don't have to go to Calcutta. The life of a householder is a preparation for sannyasa and if viewed properly, householder life is sannyasa. But of course you have to realize the purpose.

If householder life is used for fun, gossip, games, etc., then the purpose has been lost. If, as a grihastha, you are making an onward march towards spiritual evolution, then whatever comes: marriage, children, death, tragedies, births and all

kinds of disappointments, act as stepping stones to spiritual progress.

Sannyasa is not for God-realization. The purpose of sannyasa is something else. When Chaitanya Mahaprabhu came to his guru, he begged for sannyasa. His guru asked why he wanted to take sannyasa because he could realize God without becoming a renunciate. But he replied, “I don’t want to realize God. I want to serve mankind and preach God’s name as a sannyasin.” His guru said, “Right you are, here is the geru for it.”

Sannyasa is a concept by itself. It’s not a religious concept; it’s a concept based upon dedication and altruism. The purpose of a sannyasin is a dynamic one. The divine power descends through sannyasins in every age when religious values are degraded and the lower values are upgraded, and when the good people are unprotected and evil people are promoted to the higher positions in society. It is then that the power of God descends to those who take sannyasa and work with humanity.

As such, the life of a householder is very good and conducive to God-realization or samadhi. When you want to take sannyasa, you must remember that you are not concerned with God-realization, but with a dynamic way of life.

How can a householder disciple serve humanity?

The contribution of a householder disciple can be fantastic. He is the distributor of light from home to home. Sannyasins in the Himalayas are the generating power stations, their disciples are the conducting channels and the little gurus here and there are the transformers. Ultimately, spiritual knowledge has to reach everybody, but how can this be done? Householders are the individual circuits. Electricity is produced at a very great distance, transformed at the transforming stations, then brought to the street, the individual poles and finally to every home. In the same way, the role of the householder is to carry the spiritual message from family to family, from door to door and from home to home.

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Guru and Disciple

What is the definition of the word guru?

Guru literally means one who dispels the darkness which is obstructing the passage to higher consciousness. Dispeller of ill merits, of psychic darkness, that is the literal meaning of guru. But in worldly terms guru means a spiritual teacher. One who teaches the subjects pertaining to spiritual life is a guru.

Please explain the guru-disciple relationship.

In order to realize various things in life, man has expressed himself in different ways. To realize understanding, compassion, simplicity, he has fulfilled within himself different kinds of relationships, such as father and son, husband and wife, brother and sister. After having realized various forms of understanding, love and compassion, he still found that he needed something more for fulfilment. So the saints and sages revealed a transcendental relationship between two individuals which does not come within the confinements of the senses, mind and emotions. That is the relationship between guru and disciple. Just as the husband and wife have emotions which they share with each other, in the same way the guru has wisdom, light and knowledge which he shares with his disciple.

In spiritual terminology the disciple is known as *shishya* or *chela*, and the dispeller of darkness is known as guru. Just as the sun and moon rise from the east and disperse the

total darkness, in the same way, the guru comes into the life of a disciple in order to awaken and illumine his dormant potentials.

It should always be remembered that everybody is essentially light. Darkness and ignorance are an illusion. Even as a crazy man behaves strangely, so also due to maya everybody has been behaving in a crazy way. As such, we have lost the knowledge of our own greatness and have become unaware of the infinite potentiality which is inherent within each and every one of us.

Just as Hanuman was not aware of his great shakti until Lord Rama stood before him and reminded him of the fantastic deeds he had performed, so the guru comes before the disciple to remind him that he is not just a bundle of flesh and bones. That behind this physical body, behind these incapacities, ignorant ideas and actions, there is the shakti of consciousness, *chaitanya*, *atma*. That shakti is the light which is indwelling at the core of everyone's existence.

The relationship between guru and disciple is a peculiar relationship which transcends all descriptions, definitions and explanations. It is love, affection and protection, but it is beyond all of these. Guru lives in the body as does the disciple, but the guru-disciple relationship does not have anything to do with physical, emotional or sensory interactions. It is almost like two souls conversing with each other in that other realm where body, mind and sensory aggregates do not function.

Does one really need a guru for spiritual growth? Isn't there an inner guru?

This question has arisen throughout the ages, and many people feel that a guru is not necessary, while others believe guru is an absolute must. In actual fact, the real guru and the real God are one's own self; they are not outside, but it is very difficult to locate them. Therefore, one has to have a symbolic expression outside oneself. That is why most spiritual aspirants seek a guru in the physical form. To explain

it in another way, in order to explode the inherent divinity in a being, an external detonator has to be planted, and the guru is that external detonator.

Not only guru or God, but mother, father, brother, husband and son are not outside, they are within you. They are different forms of emotions, but in order to express them you need an external symbol, and that symbol is the father, mother, husband, son, or maybe even an enemy, because that is also an emotional channel in man.

To have an alliance with the guru or with God is also to experience some type of emotion. Speaking very practically, although all the emotions are inherent in man, still he needs an external form to direct them towards. Therefore, he should have a father, mother, wife, brother, child and guru or God apart from himself, until he realizes that everything is within him. Once he has communication with his inner guru he can go his own way; the external guru is no longer necessary for his development.

Of course this is only one aspect. I will give you another. From the very beginning man has been wanting to retreat from external life and experience the glory of inner life. But he does not know how to do it. Many times he has tried to find the correct way to go inside, but every method has failed. This led him to conclude that to have inward consciousness, one needs correct guidance, and this guidance can only be given by one who has already explored the deeper realms of his own mind. Such a person is the guru.

Do all disciples have the same type of relationship with the guru?

Well, as I see it, the relation between guru and disciple should mostly depend on the guru, as he has to determine the evolution of the disciple. Whereas some disciples see a guru as their guide, others see him as their friend and inspirer, or even as God. Some of my disciples will not consider me as their guide, but as a symbol for their devotion, concentration and one-pointedness and nothing more than that. They do

not accept my guidance, but they definitely love me. So it all depends on their evolution.

In the guru-disciple relationship isn't there a danger that the guru's personality will cover the personality of the disciple?

The disciple is passing through the stage of ignorance; he is a seeker, searching for light. Therefore, he looks to his guru, and the guru in turn transforms the entire personality of his disciple. This transformation is gradual. It is not the surrender of one's personality but rather the handing over of one's limited self to one who will change it into infinite self. He will add the raw materials to the big furnace, and finally steel, copper or gold will be produced. In the same way, the disciple is the raw material and the guru makes him pass through this furnace of spiritual evolution until he becomes pure material.

We must remember that when we surrender to the guru, it is not because we want to become a slave, but because we want to become a master. A disciple should never feel that he is working for his guru. When the disciple begins to think that he is doing a great service to his guru, then his ego is becoming great. When a disciple is serving his guru, he should be aware that he is serving the guru for his own spiritual evolution.

I am looking for a sadhana and a means to transform my life. Can I become your disciple?

It is you that has to decide that, not me. In spiritual life, discipleship is the most important thing. There should be innocence, one-pointedness and stability in the disciple. Guru is only the symbol. Guru is necessary, no doubt, but the disciple is more important. It is not the guru who makes the disciple, but the disciple who makes the guru.

I don't have to make you a disciple; you have to make me or someone else a guru. If you don't make me your guru, I'm not your guru. Once you have made me your guru you can divorce me if you like, but in spiritual life this should not be

done. If your guru is not living up to your expectations, you can fight with him if you like, but don't leave him. The same thing applies if you are not getting along with your husband or wife. You can fight, it doesn't matter, but what is the use of leaving? It is like jumping from the frying pan straight into the fire.

When choosing our guru should we make our selection according to our heart and feelings or according to our head, logic and thinking?

The first. In choosing anything in life you need heart and emotion. When you go to a flower shop, how do you choose a flower, through the intellect or emotions? You like it, therefore you take it. That's true with everything, particularly with gurus. If you choose by intellect and logic, you will have many gurus.

It is said that in many cases guru and disciple were together in their past life. If so, why are they separated in this life?

Sometimes an aspirant has had a guru in his past life, but in the present life he has to undergo certain experiences without any association with the guru. Once he has experienced and realized the limitations of this life, devotion and yearning for guru begin to grow in him. Then he finds his guru again. It is something like the relationship between a mother and her child. Sometimes the child cries out for his mother's milk. The mother hears him and knows what he wants, but she doesn't come, not because she doesn't love him, but because she wants to wait for the right time to feed him. So there is a right time for the guru to emerge in a disciple's life and that is when the disciple is ready to receive the guru's knowledge.

I have little faith in the ideals of the spiritual life or in the concept of guru. How can I change this?

Go to an ashram, live with the guru for some time and involve yourself in selfless service. If you change the order of mental

activity and live in a completely new situation, your mind will undergo a great change.

Is it possible to have more than one guru?

It is always better to travel by one boat, unless of course the boat has cracked on the way. If you have two or more gurus who give you conflicting instructions, you will have many conflicts in your personality. So the tradition of having only one guru is based on a deep-rooted psychology. If you are solely relying on one person's spiritual advice, you have less chance of losing psychological stability.

However, according to the tantra shastras, there are many different categories of gurus, including mantra guru, diksha guru, sadhana guru, vidya guru and tantra guru. You can have all of them, but there should be one who is your guru in the true sense of the word. The one with whom you have a very deep affinity is the actual guru and the others are teachers.

Guru has become synonymous with teacher, but please remember that guru and disciple is a relationship based on devotion, dedication and higher spirit. Guru should become your greatest friend and senior father. The relationship between yourself and your guru is not established on the basis of his teachings, but on the basis of your feeling and devotion towards him.

Swami Sivananda was my sannyasa, mantra and diksha guru, but he was not my hatha yoga guru or my vidya guru. I received my education in Sanskrit, Vedas, Upanishads, Tantra Shastra and Samkhya from different people. I also had a tantric guru, but according to tradition that person's name can never be divulged. Today, if you ask me who is my guru, I will only tell you one name – Swami Sivananda.

So even if you have received sadhana diksha or mantra diksha from a guru in whom you have absolute faith, you can still have interaction with other sadhus, mahatmas and gurus who are capable of giving you something your own guru may not be able to give.

I have lost all affection for my guru and want to become your disciple.

All gurus are one, although in form they may appear to be different. If you surrender to me I will accept you, but if you consider your guru to be different from me, then I think you do not understand the universality of guru. Guru can love everyone because he sees one in all. In the same way, whoever your guru is, you have to see all gurus in him.

When we take mantra from you and accept you as our guru, are you aware of us all the time and is the link eternal?

The link between guru and disciple is eternal, the same as the link between husband and wife. Once the guru-disciple relationship is achieved, surely the guru is always aware of the disciple. There's no doubt about it.

Is the disciple attached to his guru?

Well, it is up to him. I was never attached to my guru, and even now I'm not, but he is a part of my mind and a part of my life. I don't know how to explain this, but detachment and union can go together, although it is very difficult.

Swamiji, how does one find out if the guru he has selected is a true master, a realized soul?

If you have such doubts in your mind, it is better to wait. Even as love is blind, so is faith. Love and faith are free from any intellectual interference and this question is a direct intellectual interference with your faith.

When you see the *murti* or form of your *ishta devata*, your chosen deity, you fall in love with him. It is not the *buddhi* or intellect which decides. It is with your heart and your *bhavana*, inner feeling, that you begin to love that murti and always remember it. In the same way, when you meet your guru, if you analyze him intellectually as a spiritual, moral or academic individual, then you are not going to get anywhere.

If you judge your guru with your *bhavana* instead of with your *buddhi*, you will not recognize the loopholes which

every guru has, no matter who he is. Once a guru, or even an avatar is born into a physical body, undoubtedly he has some flaws because his physical body is governed by its own dharma. And if you begin to search for the loopholes in your guru, you will not find one; you will find thousands.

Please understand one thing. If you look for a guru with your intellect, you are not going to find one because there is no one who can fulfil your intellectual needs. Guru is not an intellectual need, just as love or marital life is not an intellectual need.

Why aren't there more female gurus in the world today?

In tantra, women are regarded as the first guru, and for initiation, a female guru is definitely considered to be more powerful than a male guru. In many religions women are not allowed to become priests or spiritual leaders, but in India there is a tradition of female gurus, and any woman who has followed the path of spiritual life and qualified herself can be accepted as a guru.

In my opinion, if more women became gurus, there would be greater beauty, compassion, love and understanding in life. But we must always remember that, whether male or female, guru should not be judged by sexual specifications. Guru is guru; there is no difference.

With so many false gurus in the world, how can we tell when we have found our true guru?

A disciple has the eyes to decipher the guru. If you want a good guru, then you should be ready to become a good disciple. Often people meet false gurus and later on they tell everyone, "Keep away from gurus, they are very bad people. I met one and he cheated me." Whenever people tell me this, I say to them, "No, you cheated him."

According to the quality of the disciple, a guru is obtained. When the disciple is sincere, he will find a sincere guru. If the disciple wants to attain psychic powers, he will run after those gurus who display psychic powers. If the disciple wants

affluence, he will run after gurus who have affluence. If the disciple wants to be enlightened, he will find an enlightened guru; there is no doubt about it. So a disciple should know himself rather than trying to know the guru. And if he wants a highly qualified and saintly guru, he should try to be a highly qualified and saintly disciple.

What happens if a disciple cannot surrender to his guru?

It may take time for a disciple to surrender completely. On account of ego it is a very difficult process. However, in the course of time and with the help of sadhana, the ego is gradually curbed and surrender occurs spontaneously.

Even though my guru, Swami Sivananda, had his own character composed of kindness, charity and compassion, and I had my own personality, consisting mainly of self-discipline, punctuality and perfection, still, in the course of time surrender came about.

My guru was a great and extraordinary person, and because I had a certain capacity to think, our ideas often clashed. I just couldn't agree with some of the things my guru did. For example, he would send fruit and biscuits to a thief while I would be chastizing him. I would think, "What level is my guru at?" He would say, "Don't talk harshly or dismiss him." But this was beyond my administrative and institutional understanding. Therefore, how could I surrender? He said, "Sit down and be quiet," and of course my mind reacted. It was many years later that I came to the conclusion that he was right and I was wrong.

You know, I never believed in ashrams, but now I am involved in many. I used to criticize yoga and say it was only for animals. This is because Vedanta was my pet subject, and Vedanta says that nobody is bound and there is no need for sadhana or to control the mind. But Swami Sivananda's commands were felt strongly within and his voice compelled me. Eventually I understood and my surrender became complete. Even though Swamiji is no longer in this world, I feel no separation.

How does one receive guru's grace?

In order to receive guru's grace, you must live constantly in communion with the guru. This may be at the cost of your social prosperity; it may make you a beggar, but that does not matter. If you want guru's grace, you must live in communion with him. Whether you receive his grace or not is up to him, but it does come if you are prepared to live in constant communion with him at any price, even at the sacrifice of the best in your life.

What is the relationship between diksha (initiation), and dakshina (offering)?

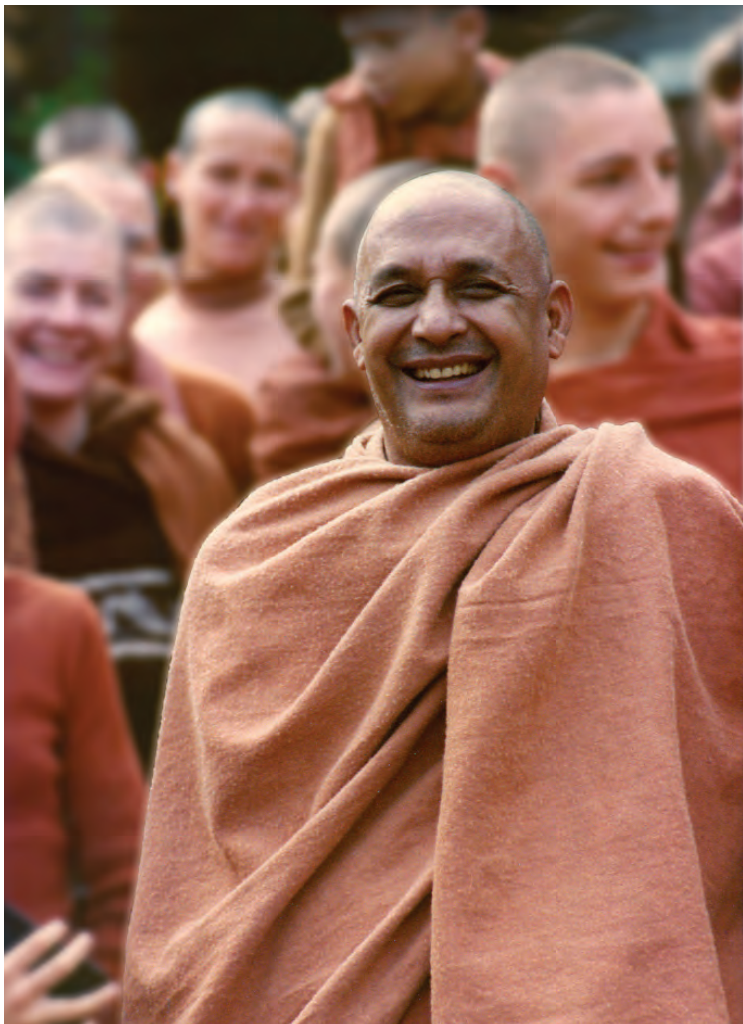
For many years I thought that diksha should not be a commercial venture or a means of earning, because initiation is a very sacred commitment between guru and disciple. Often I decided not to give diksha because I thought that diksha and dakshina should not be related. Diksha should be one way only.

Later, however, I realized that just as the guru initiates the disciple and gives him a thrust into spiritual life, the disciple must make a token surrender in the form of what he considers to be the most valued personal attachment. Gold or money has always been an important attachment. Man has been stuck to it for all time; he has fought, lied and died for it. Therefore, in the scheme of diksha, not repayment but surrender and dedication have to be offered in the form of gold or money. This is the relationship between diksha and dakshina. At the same time, a disciple can surrender more than his bank notes. It is not necessary to offer money as dakshina if you are able to offer your ego.

You know how to make a material offering; just take some money out of your pocket and give it. But do you know how to surrender the personal ego? For most people this is not possible because they do not know the way. So they make a symbolic offering instead, but does this really fulfil the purpose of dakshina?

In the absence of a real offering, that is, an offering of your self, your life, which you cannot yet do or even understand,

disciples offer their services to guru, as we did to our guru. We physically went to him and worked for him for many long years, helping to disseminate his message. That was our dakshina because it was not possible for us to give money or gold, nor was it possible for us to give our heart, mind or individual ego.



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Transmission

What are the different methods of initiation and instruction used by the various gurus?

Generally there are two ways of integrating the disciple into spiritual life: the yogic way, by means of teaching; and the tantric way, by means of transmission. Before finding a guru and beginning on either path, it is better to have a clear understanding of both ways and to be able to distinguish between them.

The yogic initiation is often very formal and structured. When teaching is given, guru and disciple always remain at a respectful distance. Guru is an expert in the various spiritual sciences, and disciple has faith in the teachings. In this method it is very important that the guru be a master of whatever science he is teaching.

Here the teachings are given on a purely academic and technical level, so it is not necessary to form any emotional or personal relationship. Therefore, the guru can have any number of disciples. He teaches the techniques and they practise them at home. In theory this works out quite well, but in practice it is not so reliable. Since the relationship is not intimate, most disciples find it difficult to continue the practices. When there is no obligation, there is no compulsion.

The tantric tradition, on the other hand, is completely different from the yogic tradition. Here the relationship between guru and disciple is not formal or specified. Initiation

can be given by wife to husband, mother to son, me to you or you to me. This method is personal rather than technical or academic.

In this system it is not necessary that the guru be a master of tantra or yoga techniques. He need not be academic or able to explain intellectually what he transmits. The important thing is that his spirit is evolved, unfettered and expansive. The disciple, likewise, is not just a simple student. In order to become an medium of the guru, he must be evolved to a great extent. He may not be interested in yoga or tantra, or in learning anything at all, but his heart and mind are open and ready to conduct the energy of his guru.

The tantric guru practises with the disciple and in time these two become almost the same. Because of their personal relationship the disciple must continue to practise, and if he becomes lazy or slack, the guru has the right to pester and push him. Such a relationship is, of course, very demanding. For this reason, you find plenty of yogic gurus and disciples all over the world, but very few from the tantric tradition.

Is transmission an important part of spiritual life?

Spiritual life does not consist of teaching alone. Spiritual life consists of transmission and contact. A guru may or may not give lectures and teach, but it is important that the guru and disciple are transmitter and receiver. This is the real relationship between guru and disciple. There is an emotional relationship because we belong to the emotional plane. This emotional relationship between the guru and disciple becomes the vehicle of the spiritual energy for transmission.

Guru and disciple may live anywhere, but there is an unseen connection between them. When one becomes a disciple, definitely this connection has to be established. Then the transmission is possible. This is a much more powerful way to be together, and this is how I live with all the disciples in my ashrams. I tell them, "Let us live and work together, and in the course of time our spiritual relationship will develop."

When the spiritual awareness unfolds and the mind is rendered clear, all the scriptures are revealed, all the practices understood, and the whole philosophy is at your beck and call. You know about Ramakrishna Paramahansa. He was an illiterate saint but he could speak on any subject. People came to him and he taught them the Upanishads, or talked to them in the language of the Bible. When the spirit unfolds, knowledge becomes natural to you. This is what we all have to learn.

How does the disciple prepare for transmission?

When the disciple is not sufficiently evolved, the guru prepares his mind and emotions through a systematic way of teaching. But if the disciple is sufficiently evolved, the teaching is not at all necessary. Then an inner communication takes place between the guru and disciple. The energy of the guru flows towards the disciple who is in tune with him.

When you connect a plug to the power point, energy automatically flows through the line. However, the energy will only flow through the line if there is copper or aluminium wiring. The point may be connected, but if the wires are made of plastic, the energy won't flow. So the disciple must be a good conductor, made of metal, not of plastic. This is the first essential qualification for transmission.

During transmission there is no block between guru and disciple. They operate on the same plane. Physically they are different, but spiritually they are one. The individuality does not function. Therefore, the second essential qualification of the disciple is absolute surrender. Take a piece of bamboo in which one side is blocked and the other side is open. You may make it into a flute, but you will never be able to play it. You have to cut that barrier so that the flute is completely hollow inside before you can get any sound from it. Therefore, the disciple has to empty himself. This is a very difficult task.

It is easy to practise japa; the disciple can do a thousand malas per day. It is easy to practise yoga, but it is very difficult to make oneself empty. The disciple has his own personality, mind, ego, pride and prejudice, so every time the guru wants

to get inside him, he finds a barrier. The guru is within, but as long as there is a barrier, communication will not take place. Therefore, in the system of transmission the last trace of the barrier has to be removed.

The attitude of the disciple should be: "I am nothing. I am the medium. I am the channel." This attitude has to be perfected day in and day out. This is bhakti yoga or total self-surrender. When you practise yoga and spiritual life, that is an act of ego. It may be a positive act, but in relation to the surrender required for transmission, it is egoistic.

So throughout the ages there have been two systems, two processes taking place between guru and disciple. One system is known as teaching and the other is known as transmission. In teaching you are always talking about spiritual life with your guru, but in transmission you don't have to do anything. It is not even necessary that you talk about spiritual life. With your eyes open or closed, he is always inside you. It is something like the relationship between two lovers.

How does the disciple make himself empty?

When the disciple links with the guru, he must work very hard to eliminate his ego. If he is able to surrender, there is not much problem with the ego, but if he is not capable of doing this, then the guru has to perform egodectomy on him. Just as you operate on different parts of the body, in the same way, there is an operation in yoga called 'egodectomy'. Elimination of the ego is the most difficult task in the life of a disciple. Very few are able to bypass the ego, perhaps one in a million.

How does the guru manage the disciple's mind?

It is the duty of the guru to guide the mind and spirit of his disciple in the right direction. Before illumination can take place, a lot of work has to be done with the personality of the disciple. The greatest problem is that the disciple is very much influenced by what is happening in his mind. If the disciple is not well developed, he is not so aware of his own mental activity. But when the disciple is intelligent and

sharp, he becomes very much aware of all that is going on his mind, and in time this influences him greatly. Therefore, many disciples live a life of mental panic.

This is a very delicate problem. If you try to silence the mind, you lose the mental capacities. Therefore, you must deal with the mind very carefully. This is the role of the guru in the life of a disciple. If a disciple's mind is completely one with the guru, he has to face his mind very little. So the relationship with the guru is like a diversion until the vagaries of the mind are exhausted.

How does the guru communicate with us on the non-physical plane?

When gurus have developed the universal mind, they can operate anywhere because the universal mind is able to unite with every mind at any time and in any place. It is not a matter of transmission, but of communication and interunion. Individual mind is only a concept; it is nothing. There is no individual mind, only universal mind. Since you are a part of the universal mind, the guru can communicate with you from any point and at any point. Two individuals can always communicate with each other because they have the same mind.

This has to be understood properly. Due to misunderstanding, the gurus sometimes have difficulties with the disciples. If a man is singing songs and a deaf man is sitting in front of him, the deaf man will say, "This fellow is not singing at all." In the same way, the universal mind of the guru is capable of communication but the disciple is not able to receive, so he says that the guru is useless. The disciple is living in the quagmire of the individual mind. The guru is sending him messages every now and then, but they fall on deaf ears. In order to communicate with the guru on an inner level the disciple must develop his universal mind.

How can we develop the inner link with guru?

We should not concern ourselves with anything transitory. Body, mind and emotions are temporary; the spirit is eternal

and our relationship with the guru should be based on spirit. If there is anything between you and him, it is between your spirit and his spirit, not between your body and his body, or between your mind and his mind. It is not a physical, mental or emotional relationship. Of course, sometimes you do take the help of this emotional relationship, but you have to step out of it, otherwise the sobriety, tranquillity, stability and homogeneity of the mind are lost.

In order to understand the deeper link with guru, you must read about the attitude the gopis had towards Krishna. Although many people consider the gopis as mere girls who played with Krishna, this was not so. The gopis' relationship with Krishna was transcendental. It wasn't his physical frame that they loved, but his cosmic body. Whenever the gopis were with Krishna, they did not feel they were with a human being. They always felt that they were in the company of divinity. When you feel you are in the company of divinity, you are very much in touch with your guru.

Why does the disciple lose faith in the guru?

Faith is spontaneous, you can't force it. In order to have faith in your guru, you need some deep inner basis. If that faith is wavering, it could be that your mind is vacillating or that the guru is creating a drama. The faith that the disciple has in his guru is seldom constant because the disciple is in the human body and so is the guru. As guru and disciple live intimately, the intimacy often brings contempt and dissatisfaction.

Sometimes the guru is also testing the disciple. Whenever a cyclone takes place in the mind of a disciple, he must clearly know that it is either a trick of the mind or a trick of the guru. In any case it is a trick. So wait for a minute please, the tempest will come down and the sun of faith will shine again.

I don't believe that faith can be intensified because I know that everybody has absolute faith. If you do not have absolute faith in your guru, it does not mean that it isn't there. It only means that the dust storms are hiding the faith. Wait

with patience and the dust will clear. Then the faith which is inherent in you will shine like the sun.

What should the attitude of a disciple be to a guru so that transmission can take place?

The disciple is the fulfilment of the guru's wisdom. The guru is like a beautiful rose plant and the disciple is the blooming rose. The right relationship between guru and disciple should be the relationship of knowledge and expression. On the physical plane the disciple and guru are inhabiting different bodies, and for a very long time the sadhana of the disciple is to use this physical body. But if the disciple can make himself competent in the right place for fulfilling the aspirations of the guru, then he can be the best expression of the knowledge of the guru.

During the course of history there have been a few outstanding gurus and, of course, a few outstanding disciples. From their lives we have observed one thing: infinite patience on the part of the guru and infinite patience on the part of the disciple. For a very long time, until they transcend the barriers of body and mind, they relate on the physical plane and are therefore aware of each other's limitations.

Take a scientist for example. He takes matter into the laboratory and that matter is conditioned. He then renders it into energy by a certain process. When the scientist knows how to render matter into energy, then he becomes the master of that energy. In the same way, the guru is like the scientist. The body of the disciple is like the laboratory and the being of the disciple is like the matter. The relationship between disciple and guru renders this being subtler and subtler, day by day, until it transcends the nature of matter.

Another important point which many people do not know is that a disciple always remains a disciple. There is no promotion. He can become anything, maybe surpassing the spiritual attainments of his guru, but still he is a disciple. For example, Swami Sivanandaji is my guru and I am his disciple. I am not going to be promoted to guruhood, I will

always remain a disciple as far as my feelings are concerned. Other people may consider me as their guru; that is different matter, that is their relationship with me. However, as far as my relationship with my guru is concerned, I will always be a disciple and I regard the perfection of discipleship as more difficult than guruhood.

When the guru dies can the disciple still communicate with him?

Communication is possible depending on the depth of the disciple's spirit. If his faith is very strong and dynamic, then he will be able to communicate with his guru even beyond this world. If the relationship is deep and spiritually potent, then it follows life after life. Guru follows the disciple and disciple follows the guru.

What happens when the guru and disciple both die?

When the disciple dies, if he has karma, he follows his own karma. If he incarnates into another body, he is again in search of a guru because of his previous samskaras. If his guru incarnates also, the disciple will find him somewhere and they will continue their spiritual romance. If somehow the guru has gone out of the orbit of evolution (this happens sometimes), then the disciple has to choose another guru of the same calibre and seek his guidance.

To make the link with the guru stronger should the disciple practise concentration on the guru?

When you try to really concentrate on the guru, you get very tired because there is no dynamism and the mind is restricted. But if you practise a dynamic form of meditation, there is no restriction in the mind. You can abuse your guru, you can sing to him, talk to him in Spanish or English, or you can leave him if you wish. You can love him and you can hate him, you can worship him and give him a mala of flowers, or you can beat him. You can travel everywhere with him and you can learn many things from him.

I think everyone has fantasies. So wherever you go into fantasy, we will go together. If you want to go and buy samosas and lassi, we will go to the market together and I will buy them for you. If you want to visit Tibet, China or the Antarctic, we will go together. And if you go to the bank or office to collect the money, we do it together.

By nature, most people are very imaginative, and this is a very easy and systematic way for them to practise meditation and to develop constant awareness of guru. You know, according to tradition and booklore, Radha and Krishna only met once in life. When she went to the river to fetch water they met each other. That's all, that was the first and last time, yet they are living together eternally. You can never say Krishna without thinking of Radha. This is union of the inner spirit. And this is what happens in the true guru-disciple relationship.



31

Saints

Please tell us the difference between mahatmas, munis and saints.

Mahatma means great soul, one with expanded consciousness. *Muni* means one who has acquired peace and silence, within and without. *Santa* or saint means a highly spiritual person, a sadhu. Seer means one who is able to see beyond the present times. *Siddha* means one who is able to control the mind and materialize thoughts. *Avadhoota* means one who has transcended the laws of nature and the laws of matter and is totally unaware of the world around him. Being completely immersed in the experience of the atman, he is not aware of the distinctions of life and he has lost the quality of discrimination between opposites.

These are the titles given to great men and women according to the different spiritual capacities they have acquired during the course of their sadhana.

Why do some people work towards unity with the self? If they become saints, what purpose will they serve in the world?

Thousands of saints and illumined people, devotees and aspirants of whom you must have heard have come during the course of history. They have guided mankind from darkness to light and they have given man a concept of higher life. They have preached compassion instead of violence, unity

instead of dissension and love in place of hatred. These people who have attained unity teach something very important, and through their teachings the world becomes better than before. If it wasn't for these illumined people, we would not have realized that compassion and love are higher virtues. We would just be animals killing each other. Of course we do that now, but on a much smaller scale because we have developed the virtue of discrimination.

Without Christ, Moses, Buddha, to name just a few, there would be no devotees in the world. Imagine the world without saints and devotees! If there were no saints, gurus or swamis, and there was nobody to teach the higher qualities, we would just be animals that can speak and think, that is all. Today we are able to think about God and spiritual matters on account of those great people who have attained unity.

If you also attain unity with the higher self, you may not be able to supply bread to your people, you may not be able to do social service, but these services are just a fraction of man's need. The real need of humanity is to develop the light of divinity and to shed the animal in him so the divine may be revealed.

Thinking of teachers such as Jesus and Buddha, are some of them greater than others, or is it more a matter of destiny that some have great historical impact and others don't?

Buddha and Christ were avatars, not teachers. We are the teachers. Popularity, name and fame, influence and impact on history have nothing to do with incarnations or avatars. The purpose of an avatar like Buddha or Christ is to present himself as an embodiment of the Supreme Spirit and to guide the bhaktas and devotees. Now, some of these beings leave a mark on history. For example, Christ, Buddha, Guru Nanak and Mahavira became historical, but that does not mean anything. These great historical impacts are not the miracles of a saint, they are the miracles of their disciples.

You see, if I were to have an historical impact on humanity, it is not because I came for that. It is because of all of you.

Name, fame and historical impact depend on the creativity and conspiracy of the disciples.

Please tell us a little of your own experience and contact with other realized beings.

As a child I was fortunate to have the contact of many swamis and saints who were passing through my place on their way to Mount Kailash. It was the advice of one of them which ultimately directed me to search for a guru. During my stay with Swami Sivananda, I met many mahatmas and saints.

After leaving my guru's ashram in Rishikesh, I lived for short periods of time with Ramana Maharshi at Tiruvannamalai, Swami Ramdas of Kalhamghat and Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry. It was during this time that I met a saint called Swami Nityananda. He was a person who, in orthodox language, could be said to have been a kundalini yogi. He lived close to Bombay in a place called Bhadreswari. Swami Muktananda is his disciple. Swami Nityananda was not in his normal consciousness. There were many people who wanted to see him, but he didn't know anyone. He used to talk to himself and was oblivious of everyone else.

When I met him he was very old and only wore a loin cloth. I went up to him and as I came closer, I felt that I was almost touching an electrical cable. He was not even aware of me until I received the shock. Then he said, "They can't carry the burden, yet they want it." You see, we want spiritual power but we are not capable of holding it. When I confronted him, he was saying, "Everything is useless!" Some people had donated a lot of blankets to the ashram and he said, "Why do you throw all these useless things to me? This is all waste paper for me." He would say, "These idiots are only fit to teach, preach and lecture." I am one of those idiots; he was a kundalini yogi.

Many saints fall ill and die from terrible physical illnesses when they are quite young. Why is this?

Most of them were not yogis. They were beyond yoga. A yogi is very aware of his body and he looks after it, but a saint is

like a young baby, an innocent child. If there is a cobra, he will just hold it. If he is given impure food, he will just eat it because he does not know the difference. He is beyond the three gunas. When his mind crosses the boundaries of the three gunas, tamas, rajas and sattwa, he becomes completely ignorant of the processes taking place in the body. His experiences are something like this: I am not this body; I am not the senses; the body and senses are not mine. The mind is not mine; the prana is not mine. I am not this; I am the self, the atma.

When these people realize the higher being, they transcend the body, mind and senses. So long as you live in the three gunas, you live according to the laws of nature. You rise in the morning, go for a walk, bathe and then practise asanas and pranayama. However, when the mind and senses withdraw completely into the self and the higher self becomes effulgent, when the inner experience becomes vivid and higher consciousness takes hold of your mind, who cares what happens to the body?

That was exactly the case with Ramana Maharshi. His body was here, but he was in the seventh plane. He was not the body, not even the seer of the body. He had completely divorced himself from bodily affairs and his body was not properly looked after. For days on end he would stay in one posture and practise endless *trataka*. He did not talk to anyone; it was as though he did not exist. When the laws of the body are ignored, one falls ill, and that is what happened to Ramana Maharshi.

Similarly, if you have a house and abandon it for a better one, the old one remains neglected. Maybe you will visit periodically, but your interest in the old one is finished. You may take care of it while you are there temporarily, but you have little to do with it any longer.

Up to the age of forty-five, Swami Sivananda maintained all the rules of health, but after that he transcended all these rules, his entire consciousness was switched off. He used to say, "This body is perishable. Why do you take so much care

of it? Are you a cobbler that shines shoes? Why so much attention to the body?" All his instructions had changed.

It is similar with Swami Vivekananda and others who died early, but their cases are slightly different. These people are born with a mission; they have something to say, to do or accomplish. The moment their work is over, they go. Swami Vivekananda has clearly written, "I have finished my work; there is no reason why I should live anymore." Another saint, Rama Tirtha, also died before forty, saying, "My work is finished, now I can go."

Remember, the practice of yoga is not the end, it is a means. Samadhi is not the end, it is a means. There are very high stages in spiritual life, and the nearer you are to the absolute self, the further you are from the body. As a jumbo jet soars so far from the earth that you are unable to distinguish a house or a garden, similarly, when the consciousness soars high, the things on this mundane plane look so very insignificant.

It is said when you have that absolute experience in which the identification with the body is eliminated, then wherever you are, you are not there. Wherever you are, you are in samadhi. So for such a person, it matters little how he dies. Diseases do not matter. Otherwise we would have to say, if Christ was the son of God, how could he have been crucified? There is a reason, and the reason is that when you go to the Supreme Spirit, you don't care for your body.

Why have some saints and yogis exhibited powers while others have not?

Within any culture there will be times of spiritual awareness and times of spiritual decadence. At such times, in order to regenerate the people's faith in higher immaterial things, such siddhis are demonstrated to show people the possibilities.

Christ was thrown challenges by the people to prove that he was a prophet and that the things said about him were true. Many mahatmas can demonstrate the same miracles today, but if they don't do it, it means that it is not necessary. When

the light of spiritual awareness is dim and darkness clouds the mind of man and the higher virtues are almost extinct, at such times these things are sometimes demonstrated.

Whenever a guru or saint is deified and the people call him Bhagavan, must we accept him as God?

I consider God to be a homogeneous, infinite source, which does not need anyone to propitiate or intercede for it. God and I can talk directly. Therefore, no matter how great a saint may be, I cannot accept that he is God. I lived with Ramana Maharshi, who impressed me very much. He could speak to me without words, and I regard him as a person of highest attainment, but still I cannot accept him as Bhagavan.

I have also lived with Sri Aurobindo, a very powerful thinker, a very deep, transcendental and intellectual man. To think about Aurobindo is to think about the whole universe. Still, I could not accept him as more than a successful yogi. Even my own guru was deified by his disciples, but I always refused to attend any such function or to use the title 'Bhagavan Sivananda'. To me he was Swami Sivananda Saraswati. Strangely enough, however, it is always the person who does not believe in God who is deified.

With so many saints and gurus in India, why is there so much poverty?

Up to the seventeenth century, India was a very affluent country. It supplied food, navy, men and materials, and even gold to many other countries. However, every country has its own political horoscope and none can be spared by nature. So things went a little bit differently during the British period. Even now the picture which is being painted is not so grim.

Indians, by nature, live a very simple life with a few dhotis and not many possessions. We don't believe that material advancement is the real advancement. We don't believe that industrial revolution is a mark of progress. We are not in a hurry to industrialize the country. We like villages very much. We prefer to draw water from the well rather than from the

tap. We prefer to go to the toilet in the jungle and bushes rather than in a special room. We like to take a bath every day outside in a pond, lake or river, and not in the bathroom. Unless it is raining heavily or too cold, we prefer to sleep outside in the courtyard, in the field, or even in the corner of the street. That is the way Indians have always preferred to live.

Therefore, India has produced more gurus, because we respect the people who have deeper wisdom and greater intuition. We know how rich people live. We know their private, personal and public lives, and we don't want to be proud of having produced a Ford or Rockefeller. Wisdom is the greatest mark of man. If man can develop his mind beyond the normal frontiers, then that is the fulfilment of his humanness. In India, people seek the association of saintly and wise people. So the social and economic situation has been limited to the extent that we get the proper opportunity to open ourselves to their influence.

Why do saints, holy men and sannyasins prefer the Himalayas to any other place in the world?

In the Himalayas, the earth, water, air, vegetation, people, everything is pure. The atmosphere there contains more ions than anywhere else. The water flowing in the rivers is amrit, ambrosia. The purity that has descended from this holy place in the form of the Ganga, the Vedas, yoga and tantra, quenches the spiritual thirst of society.

When kundalini awakens, sadhus need such a place where the atmosphere is pure and they can meditate all day without being disturbed either emotionally, mentally, physically or spiritually. This can be found particularly in the areas of Gangotri, Uttarkashi, Badrinath and Kedarnath. These are the four places where rishis and gurus live in absolute seclusion for many centuries in calm and quiet samadhi. The spiritual energy generated by them is so powerful that it even affects the physical ecology. Therefore, all aspirants should try to visit these places at least once in their lives.

Please tell us about your experiences when you visited Kailash and Manasarovar.

It is a lovely place. There is no temple, idol or poojaris, no ritual or formality, yet everything is there. You never feel that you are in a desolate region. Manasarovar is a crystal clear lake, overshadowed by the snow peak of Mount Kailash. You have nothing to do there, just sit down and close your eyes, like a god. There is no sound, no vibration. When I sat down after taking a bath, I actually saw Lord Shiva sitting in padmasana. I became aware that it was my mind's creation, that I was visualizing it, so I shook my mind. But still it was there. With my eyes open or closed, it was so clear, so pressing. Kailash, and Manasarovar in particular, is the abode of the gods. It is a place which is so far away, that now I cannot say whether it was a dream, vision, perception or hallucination.



32

Samadhi

Why is samadhi considered to be the ultimate experience by sages and spiritual seekers?

Samadhi is a state of nectar, of immortality. Each person must free himself from this limited mind and become one with the cosmic consciousness, the infinite mind. According to all canons, samadhi is the experience of fulfilment, the state where one can operate on all levels of one's being. That is why samadhi is the ultimate and the summum bonum of life. Just imagine if you had only one leg to walk on, but after some time a surgeon came and made it possible for you to walk with both legs, what a great relief that would be. Or if you were blind and could not see the beautiful world, and a surgeon restored your eyesight. Can you imagine your happiness and bliss? In the same way, the experiences of the senses, the mind and the emotions are also limited. When samadhi lights up the soul, one experiences infinite fulfilment, satisfaction and bliss. That is why everybody is craving for it.

How does one know one has experienced samadhi?

Samadhi is not a state of ecstasy, trance or unconsciousness, as some people believe. It is a state of subjective awareness, beyond time and space, where the mental body no longer functions. The state which we are experiencing now is not samadhi because there is simultaneous awareness of so many things. We see, taste, smell, listen, feel, think and know. These

mundane experiences are an expression of the interaction between the senses, the mind and the object.

Experience takes place because of duality, and ego creates this duality. Transcending duality is the main purpose of spiritual life. Duality does not refer to two only, but to more than two as well – to multiplicity. It means perception after perception, where the experience, experiencer and experienced are all functioning concurrently.

Many people have fantastic experiences which they mistake for divine. For example, one may be able to hear music clearly and completely without using the ears. This is an experience, no doubt, but it is not the ultimate. One can have thousands of similar experiences during meditation, but none of them are absolute because you are experiencing them. As long as there is an experience and an experiencer, there is ego; and where there is ego, there cannot be the absolute.

It is said about spiritual life that, “He who experiences does not know, and he who knows does not experience.” Surely the ultimate and absolute enlightenment is not a subject of experience. It is something like a state of becoming. You become that, you live that, you are that. You are not a seer, a knower, or a witness of that experience, and you can’t exercise it. That is why many saints have lived like fools. People call them mystic visionaries or crazy men. There are many names for these people. In the West they were called cynics and in India they are known as avadhootas.

If you taste honey, you say it is sweet because there is duality, but if you become the honey, what are you going to say? If you take the honey and become the honey and then I ask you what has happened, you will say, “Nothing.” That is a very important point. The transcendental experience is not a matter of experience and not a matter of discussion.

How long does the ego remain?

Ego is a very subtle principle of life which follows the soul like a shadow follows a man. Throughout the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, the same ego migrates in different names

and forms. At the time of death, the ego withdraws itself from the manifested state to the unmanifested. It enters into the causal body as dormant potential, and the moment you are given birth by your mother, the ego manifests. With the additional experiences and impressions which accumulate in the course of daily life, the ego becomes more and more fixed.

In yoga, the ego is known as *asmita* or 'I-ness'. It is the normal self-awareness by which you know yourself as an individual. It is the ego which brings you back each morning from your death-like sleep. Because of this principle, our dreams are broken and our sleep is disturbed.

In pratyahara, although the mind is dissociated from the sensory nerve channels, the ego is still present. In dharana, when concentration takes place and you begin to see visions, there is still ego, otherwise you would have no awareness or knowledge of the experience. Ego remains with you until you reach the ultimate state of samadhi.

What is eternal enlightenment?

Within man's consciousness there is a point that is light. When you have lost a valuable ornament in a room, you take a torchlight and search every corner of the room. Eventually you come to the place where the ornament is lying. You focus the torch on it and it becomes illumined; you can see it clearly. In the same way, in samadhi the focus of higher awareness is placed on the self. The self cannot be seen by the mind or experienced by any empirical sense. We have nothing by which we can apprehend it. In order to apprehend the self you have to jump over the mind.

There comes a stage when you have no mind; the mind stops for a moment. At that point of time, your creation is destroyed because your creation is the concept of your mind. When the mind is destroyed, your creation is final. It is at that moment that shoonya appears. Buddha spoke about this shoonya, the Bible speaks about it and the prophet Mohammed spoke about it. It is a state of consciousness where there is nothing; the whole process comes to a standstill. That is a wonderful

moment in man's life. Suddenly there is a great experience from within you called the divine vision, in which you become aware of the divine. Buddha called it *nirvana* and the yogis called it *nirvikalpa samadhi*. That is eternal enlightenment.

Could you please clarify the different stages of samadhi?

In yoga, there is a book of four chapters known as the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, which discusses samadhi in some detail. Patanjali tells us that samadhi is not a static point, but a field of superconsciousness composed of three separate domains. The first domain is *savikalpa samadhi*, the relative state, in which the mind is still functioning with a slight vibration. This is something like the vibration you may have noticed in a harmonium when one of the reeds is defective and vibrates out of tune with the rest. In the same way, the vibration of consciousness lingers on in *savikalpa samadhi*.

Patanjali has charted the territory of *savikalpa samadhi* very thoroughly and has left us a good road map. *Savikalpa* begins with the state of *dhyana yoga*, in which a smooth, unfluctuating flow of concentration is maintained towards the object or focus of meditation. As the samadhi becomes deeper and deeper, the aspirant enters finer realms of consciousness, the object of meditation becomes subtler and more cosmic, until finally it disappears entirely.

After *dhyana* comes *savitarka samadhi*, the state where there is only thought in the mind and nothing else; here the object of meditation is represented by words, knowledge and sense perceptions. Then comes *savichara samadhi*, a state of reflection which is devoid of language and thinking, in which only imagination and vision are functioning. Next there is *ananda samadhi*, in which there is the feeling of absolute peace and bliss. Finally comes *asmita samadhi*, where you attain complete awareness and knowledge of the self. These are the stages of *savikalpa samadhi*.

During all the stages of *savikalpa*, various experiences of a psychic nature can occur. You have read about many of them in books: the experience of light entering the body, the

experience of scents, the experience of lightning, of fire, of the sun and the moon, and the experience of angels, devas and divinities. Many people mistake these psychic experiences for the ultimate experience. They may have some fantastic vision and think that it is total enlightenment, but it is the small remnant of ego in the mind which is experiencing all these things. Therefore, such experiences come under the heading of savikalpa samadhi.

The second domain of samadhi described by Patanjali is *asamprajnata samadhi*, the intermediate state. This is an unconscious yet very dynamic state. Here there is no experience of the self, of any events, or even of the unconscious, but still the consciousness is functioning in a very dynamic way. Just as fish can swim unseen and unknown under the surface of the water, the inner awareness can be active underneath the surface of the human consciousness. Asamprajnata samadhi is a temporary state in which the consciousness is trying to transcend into a different plane. It is like taking an air journey; after leaving your car at the airport, you must wait for some time in the transit lounge before boarding the plane.

In order to get to the third and highest stage of samadhi, you must first cross the great barrier of asamprajnata. This state of vacuum is also known as the void, or *shoonyata*. Here you become totally unconscious, totally helpless. It is not within your power to move in any way you want. Your karma, sadhana, spiritual life and the lightness of your soul alone determine your passage through this intermediary state of shoonyata. It may be possible for you to come out of this void into the highest stage of samadhi, or you may return to savikalpa. When you are in this state of unconsciousness, there is no experience. You only know that you went into it and that you came back out again. The experience of savikalpa can be noted, it can be known, but not the void experience of asamprajnata.

After crossing this area, one enters the third stage, *nirvikalpa samadhi*, the domain of infinity. This is a totally subjective state in which there is only experience but no experiencer. It is

what you are, not what you see or know. You are not watching the drama, you are the drama. Neither Patanjali nor anybody else has said much about it. The only thing that has been said is that it is a perfect, absolute state of the self, where you become free from incarnation, you have total knowledge, and nothing more remains.

Now we come to a very important point. Savikalpa can be attained by most people, but to go beyond that is not a matter of personal or individual effort. It is impossible to say what decides success or failure in the final attempt to reach nirvikalpa samadhi.

What is the vibration of consciousness in savikalpa samadhi which you mentioned?

It has no particular form, name or description, but still you can feel it. Sometimes during deep sleep it is there; at a certain moment you become aware that you are sleeping. Or sometimes on a hot summer's day you take a nice lunch and then go to sleep. You are not really sleeping, but at the same time you are not awake, there are slight movements. Such types of movements are what you feel in savikalpa samadhi. I'm not able to give you any more exact examples because it's not possible.

To attain samadhi do we have to transform or transcend the mind?

You have to transform and you have to transcend. It depends on the context. Up to the point of savikalpa samadhi you have to transform the mind, and when you want to go from savikalpa samadhi into nirvikalpa samadhi, you have to transcend the mind. In science we have laws of determinacy and laws of indeterminacy. For example, scientists were able to mathematically describe the movement of electrons and molecules under most conditions, but at certain times these particles moved randomly, in a very illogical and erratic way, and standard mathematics could not explain it. Then a scientist, Arthur Eddington, said, "In order to understand the

behaviour of these electrons, you have to transcend the mind. You require a different state of mind to understand this.”

In the same way, transformation of mind takes place up to the point of savikalpa samadhi. Of course, the altitude is very high, and the subtlety is greater. Mind is not gross in savikalpa samadhi; it is very quiet, sensitive and refined. But definitely it is bound by the senses. Nirvikalpa samadhi does not belong within this boundary. There you are completely finished. Names and forms no longer exist and you are no longer separate; you are all.

How does kundalini awakening relate to the experience of samadhi?

According to tantra, samadhi can be achieved by awakening the kundalini. Kundalini resides in mooladhara chakra in a dormant potential state. When it wakes up and ascends through the various chakras, one has many experiences which are associated with the awakening of man's higher faculties. These may not be transcendental or divine in themselves, but they are indicative of the evolving nature of consciousness. This is the territory of savikalpa samadhi; sometimes illumined, sometimes dark and treacherous.

From mooladhara up to ajna chakra, the awareness is experiencing higher things, but it is not free from ego. When kundalini reaches ajna chakra the transcendence begins. This is where the ego is exploded into a million fragments and the ensuing death experience occurs. At this point savikalpa ends and nirvikalpa begins. From here, the energies fuse and flow together up to sahasrara, the crown chakra, where enlightenment unfolds.

Is it possible for a person to attain samadhi and still fall under the influences of the lower mind?

According to my understanding, samadhi is not a point in experience, but a whole area of experience. There is a point where samadhi begins and a point where it is complete. Between these two points is a large range of human behaviour.

In the earlier stages one can develop ego as well. With the initial awakening of samadhi, different emotions become very keen. Fear comes out, sexual fantasies are overpowering and ego becomes very terrible. There are references to these experiences in the lives of Buddha and Christ.

It is said that Christ was tempted by Satan and Mara, or the devil, came to Buddha and troubled him throughout the night of his enlightenment. From the yogic point of view, these references describe the stage after the awakening of enlightenment, when samskaras and karmas quickly burst out. Passion, anger, greed, ego, attachment, vanity, pride, jealousy, neurosis, fear of death and many other things may appear. That is the reason why it is recommended that when the awakening begins, up to the time it is stable, the aspirant should cut himself off and go into seclusion, otherwise he'll create chaos. He'll abuse everybody; he'll do all kinds of funny things. That is also the rule when there is awakening of kundalini. The sadhaka should seclude himself and minimize his worldly activities.

Therefore, you must have noticed that many yoga practitioners have very fat egos. It is the play of Satan, and such people should seclude themselves from social interactions for a while and perfect their samadhi. When samadhi becomes stable and a person is steadfast in spiritual awareness, then he becomes fully illumined. And when complete illumination takes place, all of his behaviour becomes virtuous and divine. You will never find him criticizing or abusing. He will have innate humility. He will not show love, but he will have love for all.

Is the jivanmukta always in samadhi?

Jivanmukti is an outcome of samadhi. You practise first, then you obtain samadhi. In samadhi, the spiritual consciousness grows, and when you come out of samadhi, you have that spiritual consciousness. So jivanmukti is a direct consequence of samadhi. A jivanmukta may not remain in samadhi at all. His whole soul has been processed in samadhi and now he lives as a result of samadhi.

In the state of samadhi is there loss of all desire for possessions?

Many people wonder what happens to man's life after the experience of samadhi. Of course, it will vary according to the different stages of attainment. At one stage there seems to be aversion for desires, while at the next and higher stage there is acceptance of desires, but with an understanding of desire in relation to a greater life, rather than in relation to oneself.

At a certain stage of evolution there is no care for oneself, but immediately after that, at a higher stage, there is greater awareness of this body, not as an individual unit separated from everything else, but as part of the cosmic body.

At a certain level in spiritual life, you may feel like renouncing all your possessions as useless. But then at an even higher level, you will again start accumulating everything just as you did in the beginning as a householder. At that time you were collecting things instinctively; you were not clear about their purpose or meaning, for you were almost completely submerged in ignorance. When you become enlightened, however, you may still accumulate property, friends, knowledge or desires, but with an unselfish purpose. You develop compassion for all living things, not only for your own wife and children.

After nirvana is attained, does the body die or does life continue as before?

Nirvana is a state which can be achieved during this lifetime. It has no correspondence to death. The consciousness has undergone a transformation but the life continues. The nirvana may affect or influence your lifestyle according to your status. If a simple village woman, a cleaner or a housewife attains nirvana, how is she going to live? Will she stop cleaning? Will she stop talking to her husband and family? No.

Nirvana belongs to the consciousness and the spirit of man. The body is perfectly the same, recognition and perception are the same, only the experience of your self is different.

Of course, some changes may take place in your body and in your general way of life, but they do not really matter.

Many people in the past who attained nirvana continued to be kings, emperors or ordinary people. I can give you the examples of Marcus Aurelius, the Roman emperor, King Janaka of northern India and the Greek philosopher Socrates. So nirvana is enlightenment. It is the illumination of knowledge, and in this respect it does not change the insignificant outer structure of life. While you are working in the world, the spirit can change, the attitude can change, but not the work.

Is it possible to integrate the experience of higher consciousness into one's ordinary life, or do must people return to their old selves?

Often spiritual aspirants find that when they come down from higher states of meditation, the experience of consciousness does not descend with them. Some people have entered into samadhi for thirty or forty days and returned without any change because the root of personality, the ignorance, is still present. But at a higher level, when this ignorance is cleared, everything is different. Life remains the same, but the background changes, the vision is completely purified. You live as a part of the cosmic being, not as a separate little unit.

Now that our time together is drawing to a close, I want to assure you that all your questions can be answered by you yourself. The master is within you. Sit down as a disciple underneath the tree of wisdom that is within, and close your eyes. Put all your questions in a file and lock them in the cupboard for the time being. Develop your consciousness, widen your horizons and awaken your intuition. Just as we are giving replies to your questions, you will find that the replies to your questions can be found within, or maybe you won't have any more questions.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Notes



The satsangs of a realized master are a gift that inspires and blesses all who receive his wisdom and grace. From the 1960s to the 1980s Swami Satyananda's extensive international touring yielded a wealth of spiritual teachings spanning a vast range of subjects. Renowned for their depth of insight, clarity and compassion, the eternal truths revealed in these satsangs are presented in this comprehensive set of volumes *Teachings of Swami Satyananda Saraswati*, for the upliftment of seekers everywhere.

Teachings of Swami Satyananda Saraswati: Volume I includes question and answer sessions given during Swami Satyananda's 1979 All European Tour, his 1980 visit to Australia and the Kriya Yoga and Teacher Training courses conducted at Bihar School of Yoga during these same years. Questions on topics ranging from the problems one faces in daily life to the highest concepts of yoga, tantra and spiritual evolution are answered with characteristic vision, understanding and colour.



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